













Eng^d by J. & M. Stoddart

Eleazer Crook

BORN JUNE 22. 1680. DIED JUNE 8. 1754.

FROM AN ORIGINAL PAINTING IN THE POSSESSION OF

ROBERT SIMPSON ESQ. DUBLIN.

THE LIFE AND DIARY

OF THE REVEREND

EBENEZER ERSKINE, A.M.

OF STIRLING,

FATHER OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A MEMOIR OF HIS FATHER,

THE REV. HENRY ERSKINE, A.M.

OF CHIRNSIDE.



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EDINBURGH: 4

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM OLIPHANT:

AND SOLD BY WILLIAM COLLINS, AND M. LOCHHEAD, GLASGOW ;
HAMILTON, ADAMS, & CO. LONDON; W. M'COMB, BELFAST ;
AND W. CURRY, JUN. & CO. DUBLIN.

MDCCCXXXI.

BX9225
E72F8

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH the prevailing taste of the age had not been decidedly favourable to biographical writings, few would have disputed the claims of the Reverend Ebenezer Erskine to a niche among those who deserve the gratitude and the veneration of posterity.

To possess authentic and circumstantial accounts, not only of the great masters of science, and of the inventors of useful and elegant arts, but also of the acknowledged founders of communities and parties, whether civil or religious,—is generally considered desirable. Religion being pre-eminently the highest of all concerns, public curiosity has been peculiarly alive to the character and history of men, whose opinions and efforts have exercised a powerful and lasting influence on the sentiments and conduct of others, with regard to that interesting subject. If it is deemed neces-

sary to acquire information relating even to those unprincipled impostors and distempered enthusiasts, who have appeared in different ages and countries to mislead mankind, and to sully the purity, as well as disturb the peace of the church ; —those “men of God,” whom providence has raised up in various periods to correct existing errors and abuses, to rekindle the latent embers of piety, and to give a new and salutary impulse to the spirit of religion, have certainly a far better title to general attention. To investigate the character and behaviour of individuals of this description, is an exercise equally beneficial and pleasing. To examine their leading views of the truth ; to mark the noble motives and aims by which they were influenced ; to trace the development of their talents ; to survey their integrity, wisdom, and magnanimity, as displayed in difficult and trying situations ; to contemplate the felicitous results of their upright and zealous exertions ; to notice with a candid and enlightened eye even the failings and defects which may have somewhat shaded the lustre of their general excellence, and obstructed the success of their laudable designs ;—these are employments calculated to interest an intelligent, a devout, and a benevolent mind.

It is highly proper, therefore, to study the biography of an AUGUSTINE, a WICKLIFFE, a LUTHER, and a KNOX. Reformers, too, of more recent times, or of less exalted fame, ought not to be

treated with neglect. To say nothing of those distinguished men, who were happily instrumental in promoting the interest of religion in Britain in the seventeenth century; it is well known that, at an early period of the last century, several eminent Clergymen, both in England and Scotland, discovered an ardent zeal for the defence of Divine truth against the encroachments of error, and for the restoration of piety from that state of languor into which it had fallen. Amongst the Scottish Ministers who embarked in this sacred cause, some satisfied themselves with those exertions which were practicable within the pale of the National Church; while others, under the leadings of Providence, adopting a bolder and more unfettered course, prosecuted their efforts in a state of open Secession.

To deny, or to palliate the faults and imperfections of the Secession Church, either in its ministers, or members at large, would be equally unfair and unwise. But whether we take a view of its numbers and extent, or of the good which it is directly and indirectly the means of doing, no candid person will question its title to some consideration and respect. Nor can it be reasonably doubted that the magnitude and usefulness which it has attained should dispose, not only those immediately connected with it, but all of every persuasion to whom the prosperity of Zion is dear, to take an interest in the history of its FOUNDERS.

Independently of the public influence which the

Fathers of the Secession exerted on its affairs, their personal excellencies were fitted to command veneration ; and their general conduct exhibits much, that posterity would do well to admire, and to imitate. Even writers who disapprove, in the strongest terms, of their ecclesiastical procedure, expressly admit that they were “men of worth and principle.”*

Among these worthy and conscientious men, Mr. EBENEZER ERSKINE took the lead in declaring the secession. His faithful remonstrances against prevailing defections, in a Sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, gave occasion to those proceedings of the Judicatories against the Four Brethren who were first associated in this cause, and the other Four who subsequently joined them ; which terminated in a total separation betwixt them and the Courts of the Established Church. However far he was from arrogating superiority in any respect to his much esteemed Brethren, who honourably shared with him in the toils and perils of the conflict, a sovereign Providence was pleased to place him in the front of the battle ; and both friends and enemies have, in consequence, been accustomed to regard him as eminently *the Father of the Secession Church*.

That he equalled all his coadjutors in every ta-

* Sir Henry Moncreiff's Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Erskine, p. 97.

lent and acquirement, is by no means affirmed. The Rev. WILLIAM WILSON, of Perth, of whom an interesting Memoir has recently been given to the world by one of his descendants, very probably excelled him in a turn for laborious research; while in a rich vein of fancy, his own brother, RALPH, of Dunfermline, was superior to both. Yet EBENEZER ERSKINE was unquestionably possessed of high endowments, well suited to the precedence assigned to him. Richly furnished with the treasure of Scriptural knowledge, as well as "unequalled in dignity of manner," his ministrations in the pulpit made him uncommonly popular among hearers of every class; while by sterling good sense, singular energy, and manly intrepidity, he was peculiarly qualified for the post allotted to him in the arduous struggle maintained by the Four Brethren against the corrupt and arbitrary measures of the Judicatories. His published discourses, too, we may add, with the exception of BOSTON'S Writings, have perhaps commanded as extensive and as lasting a circulation, as those of any other Scottish minister of that age. These remarks are in accordance with the following eulogy, which has been lately pronounced by a respectable Historian. Having adverted to the obnoxious proceedings by which the rights of the Christian people were infringed in the year 1732, he adds:

"Of those who appeared publicly in defence of the liberties of the Scottish Church on this trying

occasion, the most honourably distinguished was the Reverend Ebenezer Erskine, one of the Ministers of Stirling, a man of great natural talents, improved by a liberal education, and upwards of thirty years spent in the faithful discharge of ministerial duty. He was possessed of singular courage, great eloquence, unquestionable piety; and had long been regarded by the better part of the Church with particular respect and veneration.”*

The writer of the following sheets first turned his attention, a considerable time since, to the history of this celebrated man. He prepared a Memoir of him, which appeared in a series of papers in the *Christian Repository*, and was finished at the close of the year 1820. About four years since, he also published, in a condensed form, the substance of the details contained in that periodical work, in a Memoir prefixed to an edition of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine's Works, in two Volumes, 8vo. edited at London, 1826.

The present volume not only comprises every thing important in these previous accounts, but is enriched with additional materials, derived from a great variety of sources. The writer has improved his narrative by gleanings from a considerable number of publications, and chief-

* History of Scotland, from the Union to the abolition of heritable jurisdictions, 1748. By John Struthers, vol. i. p. 619.

ly by selections from various manuscripts, especially from the short-hand writings of Messrs. Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. Of these, some have fallen to his share as a great-grandson of Ralph; and for the perusal of others, he has been obliged to the kindness of relatives and friends. He has availed himself, in particular, of a treasure hitherto unexplored—a *Diary* in short-hand characters, written by Ebenezer, which contains an interesting account of his history and religious experience for about twenty years. With no small difficulty, and at a great expense of time and labour, he succeeded in deciphering this highly valuable record. After transcribing the whole manuscript, it appeared to him proper to introduce extracts from it, arranged rather according to the order of the subjects than the date of the entries, so as to make its different parts reflect light and beauty on each other. The 2d and 3d, and, in a great degree, the 6th, Chapters of this work, consist principally of these extracts; which, in deep-toned piety and energetic expression, have been rarely surpassed, or even equalled. They can scarcely fail to prove acceptable and edifying to Ministers and private Christians of all denominations.

How far they may tend to satisfy inquirers respecting *assurance*—a subject keenly controverted in this country at present, he will not pretend to judge. But he is not without hopes that, while they reprove the apathy of those luke-

warm professors, who discover no solicitude respecting the comfort arising from persuasion of personal interest in the Divine favour, they may afford salutary counsel to some well-inclined individuals, who have been tempted to found their consolation and hope upon assumptions unwarranted by Scripture.

These extracts from Mr. Erskine's Diary, meanwhile, in so far as legitimate influence can attach to the deliberate views and solid experience of a most upright and thoughtful person, are calculated to inspire the reader with a decided aversion to the Socinian system. One of their most distinguishing characteristics is the paramount importance, which this conscientious inquirer, after becoming decidedly pious, never ceased to perceive in the doctrine of a Divine person assuming the nature of man, and submitting to agonies and death, in order to expiate guilt, and bring in everlasting righteousness—not merely as an article of his creed, but as the foundation of all his hope in the prospect of death and eternity.

Whilst the three Chapters just specified contain the essence of the Diary, and furnish striking specimens of his acquaintance with the power of religion, most of the other Chapters include quotations from it, referring partly to his personal experience and domestic occurrences, and partly to the public transactions of the times.

It is obviously impossible to give a just and satisfactory account of the Life of Mr. Erskine,

without intermixing with it some notices of those ecclesiastical affairs in which he was immediately concerned. The prominent part he acted in the Secession, in particular, renders some illustrations of that event indispensably necessary; and his Biographer is not ashamed to avow that his prepossessions are in favour of the man and his cause. May he be permitted, however, to say, that he has attempted to divest himself of all undue partiality, and to exhibit a faithful and unvarnished statement of facts. His chief object, in undertaking this work, was to perform a useful service to all the churches of Christ, by presenting a just portrait of a distinguished Christian and Minister. Conformably to this design, he has allotted to the detail and vindication of Mr. Erskine's procedure in conducting the Secession from the Established Judicatories, nothing more than its proper proportion in the book; has studiously shunned whatever appeared to him contrary to Christian candour; and has gladly seized opportunities of honouring the memory of several estimable Clergymen who remained in the communion of the National Church, as well as of those who considered it their duty to secede.

In arranging his multifarious materials, he has endeavoured to avoid prolixity, and to reduce within moderate bounds what might easily have admitted of much greater expansion.—The Appendix consists of some illustrations and original documents connected with the narrative.

The prefixed Memoir of the Rev. HENRY ERSKINE, of Chirnside, relates to a minister, whose life and character are intrinsically highly worthy of attention; while it forms an appropriate introduction to the Life and Diary of his son Ebenezer—and, also, to an account of his son Ralph, which, with the permission of providence, the author intends hereafter to publish. This memoir of HENRY will be found to comprehend all the particulars formerly recorded by *Wodrow*, *Calamy*, *Palmer*, and others, with some additional circumstances drawn from various authentic sources.

It is incumbent on me now to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have favoured me with valuable communications. I have been particularly indebted to my venerable and worthy friend, the Rev. JOHN BROWN, of Whitburn, who not only requested me to make free use of his own memoirs of Messrs. Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine contained in his publication, entitled *GOSPEL TRUTH*; but communicated, at different times, many particulars not included in those accounts. I am under great obligations, also, to Mr. JOHN BIRRELL, Kinnesswood, for the use of his excellent Manuscript, relating mostly to Mr. Erskine's ministry in the parish of Portmoak; the materials of which are very fully brought forward, chiefly in the 4th chapter of this work. To WILLIAM C. BALDERSTON, Esq. W. S. I have been indebted for the loan of a Diary written by

Mrs. Balderston, the eldest daughter of Mr. Erskine, of Chirnside; which has supplied some interesting notices regarding her Father and Brothers. To the obliging attention of HUMPHREY EWING MACLAE, Esq. of Cathkin, and Mr. WALTER WARDLAW, Glasgow, I owe the perusal of a large Note-book, containing the Diary written by Ebenezer Erskine himself. Mr. Wardlaw has also indulged me with a sight of various other authentic documents, illustrative of the character and history of the Erskines. By the kindness of my learned and respectable neighbour, the late Rev. WILLIAM CRAIK, Kennoway, Clerk to the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, I had full access to the Records of that Presbytery, from which much new information has been received, respecting Mr. Erskine's circumstances and conduct during the twenty-eight years of his ministry at Portmoak. The Rev. ROBERT SWAN, of St. Monance, Clerk to the Synod of Fife, has also very kindly furnished some extracts respecting him, from the Records of that Synod. My best thanks are due, likewise, to the Rev. JOHN SMART, of Stirling, for allowing me to examine the numerous collection he possesses of the short-hand Note-books of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine; from which, as well as from similar books written chiefly by Mr. Ralph Erskine, that belong to my brother, the Rev. WILLIAM FRASER, of Alloa, and myself, I have learned some interesting facts, and obtained some curious papers. To every individual not named, who has

afforded the writer any assistance in collecting materials for this publication, he begs to return his cordial acknowledgments.

In conclusion, he desires, above all, humbly to remember his dependence on the Father of lights, without whose benign influence, no production can prove either creditable to the writer, or useful to the reader. That God, by his blessing, may render this little work, whatever be its defects, conducive, in some degree, to his own glory, and to the advancement of pure and undefiled religion, is the prayer of

THE AUTHOR.

KENNOWAY,

March 1831.

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MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. HENRY ERSKINE, A. M.

MINISTER

FIRST AT CORNHILL, AFTERWARDS AT CHIRNSIDE.

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. HENRY ERSKINE, A. M.

His Birth—Education—Ordination at Cornhill—Success of his ministry—Ejection—Voyage to London—Removal to Dryburgh—Appears before the Privy Council at Edinburgh—Sentenced to confinement in the Bass, but permitted to go into exile—Residence near Carlisle, then at Monilaws—Imprisonment at Wooler and Newcastle—Ministry at Rivelaw—Mr. Boston's conversion—Instances of providential relief to Mr. Erskine and family—Ministry at Chirnside—Triumphant death and impressive charge to his children—Interment—Sepulchral monuments—First and second marriage—Margaret Halcro his widow, and family—Friends and fellow-sufferers—Writings.

THE REVEREND HENRY ERSKINE, of Chirnside, was a man of considerable eminence. His Christian graces and attainments, his valuable and successful labours in the ministry, and the various sufferings he endured in the cause of truth, have combined to embalm his memory in the hearts of the pious. The celebrity acquired by two of his sons has also contributed to enhance and to perpetuate his fame. If the Rev. Philip Henry is remembered with sentiments of affectionate veneration as the father of Matthew Henry, that distinguished expositor of Scripture, the name of Henry Erskine is regarded in the church with similar feelings of reverence and love, as the father of Ebenezer and Ralph.

This excellent minister was born in the year 1624, at Dryburgh, “the seat of an ancient abbey,” on the banks of the Tweed, in the parish of Mertoun, and county of Berwick.* By his father, Mr. Ralph Erskine of Shielfield, he stood related to the ancient house of Mar.† His father’s family was uncommonly large, consisting of thirty-three children; and so great was the number of grandchildren, with whom this venerable patriarch, for some time prior to his death, was surrounded, that, according to tradition, he could not recollect them by face, and when he happened to see them, frequently proposed the friendly question—“Who are you, my little man?”

The subject of this memoir was one of the younger of these thirty-three; and notwithstanding the expenses previously incurred in rearing a numerous train of brothers and sisters, his education was by no means neglected. The early proofs he gave of piety and talent, determined his parents to grant him every advantage they were able to afford. After finishing the elementary studies of the grammar school, he attended the university of Edinburgh, where, having acquired a competent knowledge of languages, philosophy, and theology, he received the degree of Master of Arts.‡ The Principal at that time was the Rev. John Adamson, a man of eminent ability, varied learning, and consummate prudence, who presided over the university from the year 1625 to 1652. Amongst the Regents, or Pro-

* An account of this abbacy, written by the late Earl of Buchan, may be seen in Grose’s *Antiquities*.

† See Appendix, No. I.

‡ Chalmers’ *General Biographical Dictionary*, vol. xiii.

fessors, during the latter years of that period, we find the names of Messrs. James Wright, James Wiseman, and Robert Young.*

Henry Erskine's improvement in knowledge and in piety was very probably promoted, in no small degree, by the public ministrations, and private counsels of the worthy men, with whose pastoral care he was privileged in youth. Mr. Andrew Simpson, minister at Dryburgh, was distinguished for spirituality of mind, and unremitting attention to prayer, and the reading of the scriptures. "He was a most free reprover," says a noted clergyman, "of whatever he accounted sinful; and, for that reason, he was, by order of the Parliament 1621, imprisoned in the castle of Dumbarton, where the Lord blessed his preaching and prayers for the conversion from popery of the lady of Sir John Stewart, the captain of the castle. After a while he was liberated, and returned to Dryburgh, where, and at Mertoun, he preached till his death."†. The Rev. John Smith, who appears to have succeeded Mr. Simpson in the parish of Mertoun, gave evidence of the same heavenly temper. "He had all the Psalms by heart," says the writer just quoted, "and used at meals to repeat a psalm. When he met with any young men intending for the ministry, he used gravely to exhort, and heartily to bless them. He once took me off the street of Edinburgh into a house for that purpose."‡ To be

* Bower's History of the University of Edinburgh, vol. i. p. 223, &c.

† The Lives of Eminent Divines and Private Christians, who lived in Scotland during the first century after the Reformation, by the Rev. John Livingston, Minister at Ancrum. Glasgow edit. 1754, p. 12.

‡ Ibid. p. 21.

placed under the ministry of pastors so richly imbued with the spirit of Christian piety and kindness, must be an invaluable advantage to candidates for the sacred office.

The religious principles which Mr. Erskine embraced, exerted a powerful influence on the events of his life. Having carefully studied the questions to which, in that age, the public attention was eagerly directed, he conscientiously and decidedly attached himself to the doctrines of the Scots Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith, and to the presbyterian forms of worship, discipline, and government. Conformably to these sentiments, he received license to preach the gospel from presbyterian ministers, and was afterwards ordained by clergymen of that persuasion.

The place where this good man first ministered, was Cornhill, a village in the parish of Norham, and county of Northumberland, pleasantly situated on the south bank of the Tweed, about fifteen miles east from the spot of his nativity. The year of his ordination, and consequently the precise duration of his ministry at Cornhill, we are unable, certainly, to determine. According to Calamy and Palmer, he was minister of the chapel of Cornhill only three years.* Wodrow, however, extends it to thirteen years;† and, agreeably to this account, the inscription of the new monument, lately erected to his memory, represents him as ordained at Cornhill in 1649. The Diary of his son Ralph

* Calamy's Continuation, vol. ii. p. 678. Palmer's Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. iii. p. 62. This writer says, "Cornhill chapel, in the parish of Norham. Randall has it A. Scott, an intruder, 1649."

† History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 256, 1st edit.

contains an entry, stating that Mrs. Balderston, his sister, was born at Galashiels, June 28, 1653. But whether Henry Erskine and family at that time resided at Galashiels, or whether the first Mrs. Erskine, notwithstanding her husband's being then minister at Cornhill, found it convenient to spend a few weeks with relatives at that village, it seems impossible now, positively, to ascertain.

His labours at Cornhill, whether the period of their continuance may have been longer or shorter, were signally blessed. At first he found the people ignorant, ungodly, and rude. So virulent was their hostility to serious religion, that, when sitting in his own house, he sometimes heard them cursing him in the street. By the divine blessing, however, on his excellent ministrations and prudent conduct, a surprising change took place in their character. They became warmly attached to him for his Master's sake ; and when, by the act of Uniformity, August 24, 1662, he, in common with two thousand faithful ministers in England, was ejected, they deeply regretted his removal. The following anecdote is related on credible authority. Immediately after his expulsion, and before an episcopal clergyman had been appointed to succeed him, some of the parishioners attempted to plough the glebe for Mr. Erskine's benefit ; but the agent of the Bishop soon compelled them to desist, and employed others to cultivate the land for the advantage of his lordship. One of these workmen, to whom a fellow-labourer had expressed his sorrow that their late pastor should be deprived of the glebe, especially while there was no other incumbent, returned an uncivil answer to the generous remark, and, in terms too coarse to be repeated, pro-

nounced a horrid imprecation on himself, in the event of his relinquishing the work. A few minutes after the ominous words had proceeded from his lips, this reckless individual was seized with a violent distemper, which proved fatal within the space of two or three days. His sudden death was regarded by the people as a providential judgment. Whether this interpretation of the melancholy occurrence deserve approbation or censure, they were universally struck with such consternation, that no one could be found daring enough to renew the experiment of cultivating the glebe that year for behoof of the bishop. Mr. Erskine's friends were allowed to plough, sow, and reap it for his use; and it was remarked that the ground produced an uncommonly rich crop, which supplied his family with bread for a considerable time.

His services in the first sphere of his ministerial exertion were not soon forgotten. After the lapse of half a century, he was remembered with veneration and gratitude by some aged survivors, to whom his discourses had been blessed; as appears from an account of him in manuscript, composed in the year 1715, by Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, then at Portmoak, which contains the following sentence: "His son Ebenezer having occasion, of late, to be at Cornhill well, he found his father's name fragrant and savoury among some old people, who had been under his ministry, and were exceedingly kind to the son for the father's sake." *

* The author was favoured some years ago with a perusal of this MS. which then belonged to a lady in Stirling. See also in the Advocate's Library, among the Wodrow MSS. Robt. iii. No. 17. "Abbreviat of the Life and Sufferings of Mr. Henry Erskine, by his Son. Recd. May 1716."

To whatever cause it was owing, the emoluments of his small living at Cornhill were, during his incumbency, partly if not entirely withheld. Being advised to make application to the king for redress, he undertook a voyage to London, some circumstances of which are deserving of notice. The ship he embarked in was obliged, by the state of the wind and weather, to put into Harwich, and to remain there for three weeks. But, by the kindness of Providence, the delay was over-ruled for good. The religious people of that town, on finding that he was one of the ejected ministers, invited him to preach the gospel to them; heard him with great satisfaction both on Sabbath and on week days, and gave him substantial tokens of their gratitude and esteem, during his stay, and at his departure. On his arrival at London, after soliciting the countenance of some individuals who had influence at Court, he presented his petition to the king. It proved, however, altogether fruitless. After long and expensive waiting, he was dismissed with the ungracious reply, that he could be furnished with no warrant to recover his arrears, unless he would promise to conform in future to the established church. Several Scottish noblemen, with whom he had been formerly somewhat acquainted, offered him handsome benefices, on condition of conformity: but he peremptorily declined all such proposals, assuring them that he would cast himself and family on the care of Providence; and that he deemed it far better for him, if necessary, to beg his bread, than to violate his duty, or counteract the dictates of his conscience.

To what extent he was gratified by the public services or personal intercourse of the pious clergymen of

London, during his stay in that city, we cannot particularly state. One of his manuscripts, however, contains the heads of several sermons preached by Mr. Sibbald at Blackfriars, London, in December 1663. It seems probable, therefore, that he had embraced an opportunity of hearing these sermons, on occasion of his visit to the metropolis that year.

His efforts to obtain the arrears due to him having completely failed, he was obliged to retrace his steps, with a sorrowful heart and an empty purse. He agreed with a shipmaster bound for Leith. A short time after the commencement of the voyage, when about to pay for some victuals, he showed a ship-boy a crown, being all that now remained of his pocket-money, proposing to exchange it for smaller coin : but, to his great mortification and surprise, the youth told him that his crown was not worth a farthing. He consequently made known his circumstances to the master of the vessel, and asked the loan of a little money, promising payment, if it pleased God to bring him safe to Edinburgh. A different mode of relief, however, was unexpectedly provided. When they had proceeded several leagues to the north of Harwich, a violent storm arose, by which they were driven—they scarcely knew whither ; and the mariners were quite at a loss in what direction they should steer the vessel. But, by the sovereign appointment of Him, whom the seas and the winds obey, they were compelled to return to Harwich, and detained there for the space of six weeks. Mr. Erskine was thus favoured with an unlooked-for opportunity of making a second visit to his good friends in that town, which proved mutually gratifying in a high degree. He employed the six weeks in administering to them, with

zeal and diligence, the bread of life ; while, on their part, they esteemed it their honour and happiness to entertain him hospitably in their houses ; and to furnish him, on leaving them, with whatever might conduce to his comfort in the voyage. When he subsequently related to his fellow-passengers the difficulties he had been involved in, and the way in which providence removed them ; the services he had been enabled to perform, and the liberal remunerations given him ; they all concurred in expressing their conviction that he was the JONAH, on whose account the storm, by which they were so long kept prisoners at Harwich, had been raised and continued. The master of the ship was so impressed with the sanctity of his character, and the special protection with which the God of heaven appeared to honour him, that he would accept of nothing from him, either for his freight or maintenance. Nor must we omit to mention, that, according to the narrative,* the people of Harwich were so greatly pleased with his conversation and discourses, that they earnestly entreated him to return with his wife and family, and take up his residence amongst them, as their stated pastor ; promising to give him due subsistence and encouragement. With this cordial request, he was himself very much inclined to comply ; but Mrs. Erskine could not be prevailed with to remove to so great a distance from her relatives and her native country.

Soon after his return from London, he finally took leave of Cornhill. Deploring the violent separation

* “ Abbrev. of the Life and Sufferings of Mr. H. Erskine, by his Son.”

effected by human tyranny, between him and his flock ; yet confiding in the wisdom, all-sufficiency, and goodness of God, he removed his family to Dryburgh, where they appear to have resided about eighteen years. He was indebted for a dwelling-house to his brother, Mr. Erskine of Shielfield, who tenderly sympathized with him under his hardships and privations. If this was not the same Mr. Erskine who has the honour to be included in Wodrow's numerous list of those Scottish Presbyterians, on whom fines were imposed by Middleton, in the Parliament 1662, he seems, however, to have been a man not merely of the same name, but of a kindred spirit. The list referred to, particularizes among others, "John Erskine, portioner of Dryburgh, [fined] in £600."* "The persons contained in this act of fines," says that respectable historian, "so far as I can now learn about them, were, generally speaking, of the best morals, and most shining piety in the places where they lived ; and chargeable with nothing but being Presbyterians, and submitting to their conqueror when they could do no better."†

From veneration for the memory of Mr. Erskine and family, the dwelling-house which he occupied in Dryburgh, and where his son, Ebenezer, was born, was long preserved. In a Memoir of the late pious lady, Ann Agnes Erskine, published in the year 1805,‡ it is stated, that the house was then standing ; "being preserved by the present Lord Buchan, in its primitive state, as a relic and memorial of them." So late as December

* Scots money.

† Wod. Hist. vol. i. pp. 121, 122. App. No. 33.

‡ Evang. Mag. vol. xiii. p. 242. Burder's Memoirs of Eminent Pious Women, vol. iii. pp. 257—264.

1823, it was affirmed by a gentleman residing with his lordship, in reply to a letter requesting information respecting the family, that Lord Buchan had caused “the *part* of the house inhabited by them to be preserved.”

Countenanced by relatives, and by old friends and acquaintance; and above all, encouraged by the promises of that God who had “put him into the ministry,” Mr. Erskine occasionally exercised his office at Dryburgh. The expulsion of Mr. James Kirkton, who was ejected from the parish of Mertoun, by the act of council passed at Glasgow, 1662, and succeeded by an Episcopal incumbent,* rendered the services of this esteemed Presbyterian, in his native parish, the more desirable and necessary. To all who had the inclination and the courage to hear him in those days of misrule and oppression, he faithfully addressed the message of the gospel; preaching generally in his own house, but sometimes in the fields. Nor did he neglect opportunities of attending divine ordinances, when administered by others in a manner that met his approbation.

An instance of this pious attention, which occurred about the year 1665, is worthy of record. It is alluded to by his daughter, Mrs. Balderston, in her Diary, when detailing the circumstances of her first dedication of herself to the Lord. Her statement is as follows:—“I cannot well remember what age I was of; but I think I will have been between one and two-and-twenty years of age. I was in the old Lady Craigmillar’s family, and had desired liberty to go south to see my father and friends; my father then living in Dryburgh. And when

* See the Biographical Notice prefixed to Kirkton’s Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland, &c.

I came there, they were all intending to go to Ousnam communion ; which, I believe, was the last that ever Mr. John Scott had there. Perceiving their *serious preparation*, I began to think, certainly I had as great need as any of them. Then I thought I would read the scriptures and pray ; and I had a great desire to be a partaker—which I told to my father. But he was altogether against it ; alleging, as he had good ground, that I was ignorant, and if I had not an interest in Christ, I could not expect good there. I said to him, what knew he but I might get *that* there, that I never had before. But I finding him not for it, yet would not be put off. I went to my cousin, Mr. William Areskin, who was in the same town, and told him my earnest desire to be a partaker of the Lord's Supper ; and he encouraged me in it.—And I remember on the Monday, my father had that expression in his prayer, ‘O that many were longing for such another occasion.’ I thought, I am sure I would give all the world for such another. And when I was to go in to Edinburgh ; I remember when my cousin, Mr. Areskin, was taking his leave of me, he laid his two hands on my shoulders, and looked up to heaven, and said, ‘The Lord be with thee!’—which had such an impression upon my heart that never wore off it again. For I am sure he got his request ; for ever after, the Lord was with me.”

During his residence at Dryburgh, the subject of this Memoir seems to have prosecuted sacred studies with peculiar ardour. We have seen two manuscripts written by him, towards the commencement of that period. The one, dated July 29, 1664, consists chiefly of extracts from various authors on theology and church-history, including Clark's Ten Heathen Persecutions.

The other is a small thick volume, containing a concise system of divinity in Latin ; which appears to be his own composition, very neatly written, and perhaps originally intended for the press, though never published. It extends to 362 pages, and includes short answers to 647 questions on twenty-seven points in theology.*

While thus engaged in privately exercising his ministry, and pursuing his favourite studies at Dryburgh, he probably experienced no great annoyance for a considerable time. But in the year 1682, in common with many other worthy presbyterians, he smarted under the cruel severities then inflicted by various parties of soldiers, on persons “ guilty, or suspected to be guilty, of withdrawing from ordinances in their own parishes, of keeping conventicles, and of disorderly baptisms and marriages, since his Majesty’s late act of indemnity, 1679.”† On Sabbath, the 23d April, Adam Urquhart, of Meldrum, one of the most active officers entrusted with the command of forces in those disreputable services, coming with a company of soldiers, seized him when worshipping God with his family, carried him to Melrose, and kept him prisoner that night. The day following he was released ; Mr. James Erskine, of Shielfield, his nephew, giving a bond of 5000 merks for his appearance when required. On the 8th of May, Meldrum, having returned from the West of Scotland to

* The title of this MS. is “*Theologiæ Ostium, in quo Apices Quæstionum Theologicarum, cum earum solutionibus, ex ore duorum vel trium testimoniorum signatis, continentur. Ab Henrico Areskino, hæc, 1665.*” The twenty-seven topics discussed, are denominated *Puncta*. The conclusion of the work is thus dated by himself ; “*Finem hisce, Augusti 4, 1665, imposui.*”

† Wodrow’s Hist. vol. ii. Book iii. Ch. 6.

Melrose, called for the minister and his nephew, and giving up the bond, carried the former to Jedburgh, where again he found bail for his appearance at Edinburgh on the 12th of that month. Though labouring under a severe indisposition, he was obliged to undertake the journey at the time appointed. One of his descendants is possessed of an ebony cabinet, formerly the property of Mr. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, containing a number of small family relics, including a pair of *thummikins*, with which, according to tradition, the good man had the honour of being invested at the time he was taken prisoner to Edinburgh. When he appeared before a committee of the Privy Council, Sir George M'Kenzie, the King's Advocate, after some previous examination, asked him if he was willing to give bond to preach no more at conventicles; but Mr. Erskine boldly replied, "My Lord, I have my commission from Christ, and though I were within an hour of my death I durst not lay it down at the feet of any mortal man." The advocate having reported the matter to the Council, his cause was delayed till the 6th of June; and he gave bail under 4000 merks to compear at that time.

On that day, accordingly, he appeared in the presence of the Council, and a libel, which, together with the summons, had been sent him on the 2d of June, was read, accusing him of preaching at conventicles, and of disorderly baptizing and marrying. Being asked by Chancellor Haddow Gordon what he had to say to the libel, he replied, "It was well known to those who resided in his neighbourhood, that from September 1681, to the end of February that year, he was, in providence, afflicted with a severe flux, which disabled him

from bowing his knees before God in his family ; and that subsequently, he had, by a violent ague, been rendered incapable of performing any part of his ministerial duty.*" The Chancellor, agreeably to the usual custom in those unhappy times, though in contradiction to an established maxim in law, "that no man is obliged to swear against himself,"† inquired if he would make oath that he had not preached, baptized, or married, from September to June. To this question he answered, that he was not free to give his oath for the whole of that time. Though nothing was proved against him, sentence was immediately pronounced, ordaining him to pay a fine of 5000 merks, to be committed that night to the tolbooth of Edinburgh, to be carried next day to the Bass, and to remain prisoner there till the fine should be paid, and security given that he should preach no more. Strongly apprehensive that confinement in the Bass‡ would prove exceedingly injurious, if not absolutely fatal to him in the present state of his health, he ventured, that afternoon, to present a petition to the Council, requesting an alteration of the sentence on that account, and soliciting permission to go into exile from Scotland, sufficient security being given for his departure. Through the influence of friends, the Council granted this request as a favour ; and Mr. John Brown of Park, Mr. Erskine's

* In former times, prior to the modern improvements in agriculture, the Merse was much infested with agues. Kerr's View of the Agriculture of the County of Berwick, p. 474.

† *Nemo tenetur jurare in suam injuriam.*"

‡ See an interesting description of this famous rock, and of its prison, in Crichton's Memoirs of the Rev. John Blackader.

nephew, who remained alive at least till the year 1715,* bound himself in a bond of 5000 merks, that his uncle should, within fourteen days, quit the kingdom, never to return without liberty given. He was, in consequence, released from prison, the clerks of the Council having got twenty-one dollars from him, and the jailor, with his servants, four—expenses which, unquestionably, he could not well afford.

Here it seems right to advert to the following statement respecting Henry Erskine, which occurs in an extensive biographical work:† “The persecution carried on in Scotland against the presbyterians,” says the writer of the article referred to, “obliged Mr. Erskine to take refuge in Holland, whence want of the common necessities of life induced him again to return to his native country, where he was apprehended and committed prisoner to the Bass, a strong fort in the mouth of the Forth. There he continued near three years, till, through the interest of the Earl of Marr, his kinsman, he was set at liberty.” But on what authority these assertions have been made, we do not know. From the statements of his son, Ebenezer, it sufficiently appears that when “sentenced to the Bass in 1682, he was reprieved on promising to leave the kingdom.” We are aware of no documents that show that either then, or at any other time, previous or posterior, he was actually imprisoned in the Bass. His taking refuge in Holland for a season, though this measure was resorted to by many of his fellow-sufferers, seems also questionable. The entire silence respecting it observed

* Abbrev. of the Life and Sufferings, &c.

† Chalmers's Gen. Biograph. Dict. Art. Erskine (Rev. Henry.)

by his son, in his account of him, serves at least to cast a doubt on the fact.

Mr. Erskine, in conformity with his engagement to the Council, prepared for leaving the country within the specified time. Sustained by the same spirit of faith with the patriarch who "went out, not knowing whither he went," he took leave of his wife and children, and removed to the north of England, having no prospect of any certain abode, but committing himself and family to the care and direction of providence. He went first into the county of Northumberland, but finding some cause for apprehension regarding his safety, he proceeded to Cumberland, and at last fixed at Park-ridge, about ten miles from Carlisle, where the proprietor of the village allowed him a dwelling-house. In the month of September he sent for his wife and family, and for more than two years they resided here in a state of considerable tranquillity. To what extent he then employed himself in preaching the gospel, it is impossible to state particularly. His zeal, however, could not suffer him to remain altogether idle; and, in the day when God "writeth up the people," it may possibly appear that the services he performed occasionally, and "as it were in secret," were more abundantly blessed than the stated and public ministrations of many able and faithful pastors, to whom more peaceful times have been assigned. It was perhaps while he lived at Park-ridge that an instance of success occurred, which is thus related in a well-known periodical publication:

"The Reverend Henry Erskine, (father of the late Messrs. Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine,) when living in a retired house upon the Border, in the north of Eng-

land, noticed one day a number of people digging peats, and upon coming to them, he observed that they were too merry. To which one of them replied, ‘ Sir, we suppose you are a minister, and if you will consent to preach a sermon, we will sit down and be grave hearers.’ ‘ I fear,’ said Mr. Erskine, ‘ you are not in a proper frame for hearing a sermon.’ They, however, pressed it so much on him, that he at last consented, and, after retiring for a little while to a secret place, he came forth and preached to about thirty work people, which happily issued in the conversion of eleven. How astonishing are the methods of grace ! O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !”*

Towards the close of the year 1684, or early in 1685, he accepted a kind invitation from Mr. Gray of Preston, the ancestor, it is supposed, of the famous Grays of Howick, to dwell under his protection at Monilaws, an obscure village in the parish of Branxton, about two miles from Cornhill, whence he had been ejected. Soon after taking up his residence in this place, his family was happily encreased by the birth of his son Ralph. The repose he enjoyed here, however, was very soon interrupted. On the 2d of July 1685, he

* Evangelical Magazine, vol. v. Supplement, p. 544. The author has permission to state, that this anecdote was furnished to the Editor of that Magazine by the Rev. John Brown, Whitburn, and that it was told Mr. Brown by that worthy man, the late Rev. Mr. Johnston of Ecclefechan. A respectable person, named John Hope, a member of Mr. Johnston’s session, and the son of one of the eleven individuals hopefully converted by means of that sermon, had related the fact to his minister many years before.

was apprehended by eight of the militia horsemen, and carried to Wooler. Next day they brought him to Colonel Struthers at Fowberrie, who told him that, in compliance with an order from the king, he must go to Sir John Fenwick at Newcastle. That night he was sent back to Wooler, where he had the happiness to meet with the Rev. Luke Ogle, the ejected minister of Berwick. Confined in the same prison, and suffering in the same cause, their mutual communications, like those of Paul and Silas, must have proved truly refreshing to both. On Saturday, July 4th, they were conveyed on horseback, under a guard of nine soldiers, to Eglingham, to the house of a Justice of Peace. Here they remained till Monday, the 6th of that month; for, as Mr. Wodrow observes, "it seems the English were a little more careful of the Lord's day than our Scots persecutors."

Mr. Erskine, in the morning of that day, was seized with a violent cholic, which gave him excruciating pain, and threatened an immediate dissolution; yet so unfeeling were the soldiers that they hurried him away, when it was scarcely possible for him to sit on his horse. By the kindness of providence, however, he and Mr. Ogle, who was also indisposed at the time, reached Newcastle in the evening. When they called, about seven o'clock, at Sir John Fenwick's gate, he ordered them to prison, and at the same time deprived each of them of his horse, which was never restored.

Mr. Erskine's sickness and pain still continuing, he experienced from strangers, and even from persons of the lowest rank, that sympathy which it is vain to expect from men whose hearts the fell spirit of intolerance has steeled alike against the dictates of piety,

and the common feelings of humanity. The prisoners, commiserating his condition, requested the jailor to give him liberty for a few days, till he recovered from his painful affliction. The jailor having kindly yielded to their importunity, he was received into the house of a Mrs. Mann, who acted towards him the part of the good Samaritan. He lodged with her about fourteen days, during which she assiduously took care of his health, and furnished him with every accommodation she was able to afford; yet the prayers of her pious guest were the only remuneration she would accept. The benevolent services of this generous and sympathizing female will appear, we trust, amongst those offices of charity, which the Redeemer himself will graciously acknowledge and reward, in that great day, when he shall say to those on his right hand, "I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me."—After his recovery, he voluntarily returned to prison; but on the 22d of July, he and Mr. Ogle were set at liberty, in terms of the Act of Indemnity passed at the commencement of King James's reign. The considerate prisoners gave an additional testimony of their sympathy and esteem, by contributing for him at his departure, the sum of 30s. to defray the expenses of his journey home.

Having been mercifully restored to his family, after this cruel interruption of his peace, he continued to preach the gospel at Monilaws, usually every Lord's day, for about two years more. But, after the toleration granted by King James's proclamation of indulgence, a number of pious presbyterians residing in the parish of Whitsom and its vicinity, a few miles west from Berwick, on the Scots side, gave him a call to exercise

his ministry among them, which he accepted; and, on September 1, 1687, after having got up his bond from the Council of Scotland, * he removed with his family to Rivelaw, where his people erected a meeting-house. This hamlet, in common with many old villages, seems to have almost entirely disappeared: but, if we are not misinformed, there is still at least, one inhabited house that bears the name of Rivelaw. Mr. Erskine discharged his office here with much approbation and success, till the happy Revolution in 1688.

One instance of the success of his labours in this place, pre-eminently deserves to be recorded—the conversion of the celebrated Thomas Boston of Ettrick. “Towards the latter end of summer that year (1687,)” says this excellent man himself, † “the liberty of conscience being then newly given by King James, my father took me away with him to the presbyterian meeting in the Newton of Whitsom. There I heard the worthy Mr. Henry Erskine, minister of Cornhill before the Restoration; by whose means it pleased the Lord to awaken me, and bring me under exercise about my soul’s state; being then going in the twelfth year of my age.—Two of Mr. Erskine’s first texts were, John i. 29. “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world;” and Mat. iii. 7. “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” By these, I judge, God spoke to me. My lost state by nature, and my absolute need of Christ,

* His son Ebenezer, according to his own statement in the “Abbreviate” formerly referred to, was, at the time of his composing that account, in possession of this bond, “as an authentic document of the story.”

† Memoirs, pp. 8, 9, 10.

being thus discovered to me, I was set to pray in earnest. I also carefully attended, for ordinary, the preaching of the word at Rivelaw, where Mr. Erskine had his meeting-house, about four miles from Dunse. In the summer time, company could hardly be missed; and with them, something to be heard, especially in the returning, that was for edification; to which I listened. But in winter, sometimes it was my lot to go alone, without so much as the benefit of a horse to carry me through Blackadder water, the wading whereof in sharp frosty weather, I very well remember. But such things were then easy, for the benefit of the word, which came with power."

To this interesting statement in his memoirs, we may add a pleasant allusion to the circumstances of his conversion, which occurs in his soliloquy on the art of Man-fishing: "Little wast thou thinking, O my soul, on Christ, heaven, or thyself, when thou went to the Newton of Whitsom to hear a preaching, when Christ first dealt with thee; there thou got an unexpected cast." "Consider," he says again to his soul, "what a sad case thou thyself wast in, when Christ concerned himself for thy good. Thou wast going on in the way to hell, as blind as a mole: at last Christ opened thine eyes, and let thee see thy hazard, by a preacher that was none of the unconcerned Gallios—who spared neither his body, his credit, nor reputation, to gain thee, and the like of thee."

A short memoir of Mr. Henry Erskine, which appeared in a periodical publication* nearly thirty years ago,

* The Christian Magazine for 1803, vol. vii. p. 181. The memoir is written by a distinguished biographer, under the signature of *Spicilegus*.

contains the following just and pertinent reflexions on this auspicious result of his labours: "This one instance is worth a thousand. The seed of grace sown in Mr. Boston's heart, has sprung up in a numerous multitude of spiritual children. Beside the success of his ministry at Simprin, at Ettrick, and other places in the south of Scotland, the blessed effects of which still remain, he has been an eminent instrument of the revival of gospel truth and practical religion, by his numerous and valuable writings; and there is all ground to hope, shall be so to the latest posterity. Yet all this, in respect of means, originated in a single sermon preached by Mr. Erskine. Herein that Scripture was remarkably fulfilled, "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation," Is. lx. 22. See also Psalm lxxii. 16. This may suggest no small encouragement to ministers of the gospel, greatly distressed by the unsuccessfulness of their ministry. They may be doing much more good than they can, in the mean time, have any apprehension of."

Men of intelligence and piety have often traced the course of God's procedure towards his people, and, in particular, towards his faithful ministers, in times of peril and difficulty, with admiration and delight. In great mercy, he not only cheers their hearts with spiritual consolations proportioned to the number and severity of their trials; but often provides for their temporal support in a manner peculiarly striking. Inviolable faithfulness and unchanging love to his children never fail to characterize the operations of that God, who, in the days of famine, employed ravens to furnish his Prophet with a regular supply of food, and enabled

him to assure the desponding widow, "that the barrel of meal should not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail." Even in modern times, when miracles, strictly so called, are not to be looked for, relief has often been administered to necessitous Christians, so seasonably, so unexpectedly, by means so unlikely, and by benefactors so remarkably provided, that their hearts have overflowed with the liveliest emotions of wonder and gratitude; and enemies themselves have been compelled to say, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; there is no want to them that fear God." To this class of events, the pious reader will not hesitate to refer the following occurrences in the history of Mr. Erskine. The reality of the facts cannot reasonably be questioned; being confirmed by the testimony of at least two credible witnesses, his son Ebenezer, and the Rev. William Veitch. Most of them are detailed in the "Abbreviate," mentioned above, where Ebenezer expresses himself in these words: "I shall condescend upon two or three which I had from his own mouth, when living, and which he told to many yet alive, both in Scotland and England." Dr. Calamy also, to whom a copy of that manuscript appears to have been sent, introduces his narrative of the facts, with the following expressions: "This good man met with several very remarkable providences in the course of his life, of which I have an account from his son Ebenezer, who is minister at Portmoak, within the provincial Synod of Fife, in Scotland."* Mr. Veitch's testimony respecting them is given in his own hand-writing, and contained in a manuscript, entitled, "Remarkable Pro-

* Continuation, vol. ii. p. 681.

vidences concerning Harie Erskine, from Mr. William Veitch, sent April 1718.* The opportunities of information with regard to these providential occurrences, which this worthy minister possessed, are thus noticed at the beginning of the document: "When he came to live in the parish of Mertoun, in Teviotdale, he was frequently at my house in England, and assisted at my ordination. He told my wife and me the following things." In narrating these facts, we shall but slightly deviate from the homely terms made use of by the original authorities now specified.

While he resided at Dryburgh, after his ejection from Cornhill, having no regular income or means of subsistence, he and his family were occasionally in great difficulties. Their extremity, however, was usually God's opportunity of providing for them; so that, neither himself nor family, were ever reduced to the necessity of begging their bread. At one time, in particular, their small store was entirely exhausted. When they had supped in the evening, and the supper was a light one, there remained neither bread, meal, flesh, nor money, in the house. The children, awaking early in the morning, cried for bread. The good man must have felt exceedingly for them; not having a morsel to give, and not knowing where he was to find a breakfast, either for the parents or the children. But his faith did not fail, and his mental tranquillity remained undisturbed. With his usual cheerfulness, he did what he could to entertain the children, and to encourage the sorrowing mother and himself to depend on that gracious Providence, which feeds the young ravens, when they cry

* Wodrow MSS. Robt. III. No. 17.

for food. It is even stated, that he took a musical instrument, the citren or guitar, with which he sometimes recreated himself, and began to divert them with a tune. As Mr. Veitch expresses it, he played and wept alternately; he being in one apartment and they in another. While he was thus engaged, they heard the sound of a horse's foot, coming along by the side of the house, and immediately a country-fellow knocked hard at the door, and called for some one to help him off with his load. Being asked whence he had come, and what was his errand, he informed them that he came from the Lady Reburn with some provisions for Mr. Erskine. They told him he must be mistaken; and that it was more likely to be for Mr. Erskine of Shielfield, in the same place. He replied, *No*: He knew what he said, and he was not such a sot as they took him to be; he was sent to Mr. Henry Erskine. "Come," he concluded, "help me off with my load, or else I will throw it down at the door." They therefore took it from him, and brought it into the house; and having opened the sack, they found it well filled with meal, cheese, and flesh, for the relief of the family. Thus he experienced the accomplishment of the promise, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure;" and was mightily encouraged to rely on his heavenly benefactor, in all future straits of a similar description.

At another time, having made a visit to Edinburgh, his finances were so much reduced that he had only three half-pence in his pocket. Though standing in need of some refreshment, consciousness of inability to pay the bill, made him ashamed to enter a tavern, and call for victuals. But, when walking in the streets, somewhat

pensive and perplexed, he was addressed by a person apparently come from the country, who inquired, whether or not he was Mr. Henry Erskine? He answered in the affirmative, and asked what he had to say. "I have a letter for you," was the reply. The letter, which was immediately delivered, had seven Scots ducatoons inclosed in it, and consisted of the few following words: "Sir, receive this from a sympathising friend: Farewell." Mr. Erskine invited the bearer to accompany him to an adjoining house of entertainment and drink with him; and no one else being present, proceeded to inquire with earnestness, who his kind benefactor was, that he might return him thanks. The honest man, however, replied, that he must be excused from mentioning the name; for secrecy was enjoined, and he could not betray his trust. Mr. Erskine, anxious to form at least some plausible conjecture regarding the unknown friend to whom he was indebted for this seasonable aid, then began to ask him to what part of the country he himself belonged. But the man wishing, it appears, to get rid of Mr. Erskine's importunity, begged him to stop a little, while he went out. Being once gone, however, he returned no more; and who that generous benefactor was, the grateful recipient of his bounty could never discover. According to Mr. Veitch's account, the worthy man had at this time brought one of his daughters to Edinburgh for the purpose of receiving education; and the gift of his sympathising friend "was very helpful both to his daughter and family."

At another time, his money falling short in the course of a journey on foot, he was in danger of being exposed to much inconvenience. But, as he walked on, he

stepped aside towards a bush of rushes ; and, when attempting to fix his staff in the marshy ground, he heard something tinkle at the end of it. On stooping down to examine the spot, he found two half-crowns, which did him good service on his way home.

One instance more remains ; which, though omitted by his son and by Dr. Calamy, is related by Mr. Veitch. Mr. Erskine, when travelling from Edinburgh to Ormiston, to attend a numerous gathering of Presbyterians on a week-day, fell in with some country people on their way to the meeting ; and began to converse with them about their high privilege, in having such a minister, and such stated opportunities of public worship, continued with them, when so many others were deprived of these advantages ; and to remind them how greatly this distinguishing mercy, if not suitably improved, would aggravate their final condemnation. The journey being accomplished a considerable time previously to the hour of meeting, a wealthy man in the company invited him to take some victuals with him ; and, while they were sitting together, he proceeded to say, “ God has given me an abundant share of worldly good, yet formerly I never had a heart to give any part of it to his people in want ; but, since I saw and heard you, the Lord has opened my heart, and disposed me to open my purse for the relief of the godly.” At the same moment, he verified his profession by his conduct, and urged this man of God to accept of a considerable sum ; which not merely served to relieve his necessities, but gladdened his spirit, as a fruit and evidence of the divine blessing, that had rendered his instructions effectual for producing a salutary change on the heart of a worldling.

Real dignity of character, let it be remembered, is fully consistent with indigent circumstances, and with the grateful acceptance of charitable supplies. The Saviour himself condescended to undergo the hardships of penury ; and “ women ministered to him of their substance.” Thousands of whom the world was not worthy, have chosen rather to submit to the humbling necessity of being indebted to sympathising Christians for subsistence to themselves and their families, than to receive large benefices, at the expense of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. The poverty of those spiritual and conscientious men, instead of meriting contempt, entitles their memory to more than double veneration ; and without question, the merciful interpositions of Providence for their relief afforded them exquisite delight. “ I make not the least doubt,” says a writer formerly quoted, “ that they enjoyed far more satisfaction and comfort in these tokens of God’s caring for them, than the richest prelates did in all their revenues.” *

Of the numerous host of excellent ministers, who were ejected from their charges by the sweeping act of uniformity 1662, commonly called the Bartholomew Act, a large majority had gone to their long home, before the memorable Revolution of 1688 took place. The subject of this memoir was one of the few that were spared to witness that happy era. He soon after received a call to the parish of Chirnside ; to which he was, in consequence, translated from Whitsom ; and where he continued to labour with zeal and success till the day of his death.

* Christ. Mag. vol. vii. p. 183.

The town of Chirnside being only at the distance of about four miles east from Whitsom, there is reason to presume that a certain proportion of those who had formerly been his hearers at Rivelaw, still enjoyed the advantage of his ministry.

The name CHIRNSIDE is understood to denote a place hard by a *chern* or *cairn*; and it appears that several cairns, or rude sepulchral monuments, erected by Saxons and Danes, still exist in the parish and neighbourhood. The village stands on a beautiful hill. In 1740, the population of the whole parish seems not to have exceeded six hundred souls. Yet, ever since the year 1581, Chirnside has been the seat of a Presbytery. The church is of great antiquity; and though it has undergone several repairs, and received an addition, dated 1769, the pulpit, judging from its form and appearance, * seems to have undergone no alteration since it was occupied by Mr. Erskine. “That the church may be two or three centuries old,” says a late minister of this parish,† “appears from the architrave, or coarse fluting of its principal door; and also from a stone of about a foot square, taken down at the rebuilding of the east aisle or old choir, having a few rude and faded characters upon it; which, just legible, are these, “*Helpe the PVR,*” and the figures 1573 joined with them.”

Mr. Erskine's predecessor in Chirnside was Mr. Lattie, an Episcopal clergyman; who, on the restoration

* At least so late as September 1825, when the writer had the satisfaction to see it.

† The Rev. Walter Anderson, D. D. author of the account of this parish. Statist. Acc. of Scotland, vol. xiv. No. I.

of Presbytery in the Church of Scotland, retired to Eyemouth. His immediate successor was a Mr. Millar, who was soon translated to Leith, and succeeded by Mr. Hume, whose ministry lasted forty-nine years; and whose place, after his decease, was supplied by Dr. Anderson, the predecessor of Dr. Logan, the present incumbent. We are informed by Dr. Anderson, that "David Hume, though born in Edinburgh, was bred up from his infancy at Ninewells in this parish."

Some records of session, written during Mr. Erskine's ministry, are still extant. In the first minute, dated 10th May 1691, it is recorded that twelve respectable persons were set apart to the office of ruling elders. The subsequent minutes, which chiefly contain the particulars of various cases of discipline, afford ample evidence of zeal and activity in his efforts to curb immorality, and promote good order in the parish. His labours among them, we trust, were not in vain. Their posterity have been commended for sincerity in religion, for comparative sobriety, and for living peaceably together, notwithstanding diversity of religious persuasion. While the bulk of the people continue attached to the established church, some of them have belonged to the Secession ever since its commencement; and a Cameronian meeting-house has been erected in the middle of the village.* Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, if we may credit tradition, when they visited the south of Scotland, shortly after leaving the establishment, preached at Chirnside to a very large audience in the open air.

Mr. Erskine's usefulness was not confined to his own parish. From his ardent zeal and undaunted bold-

* Statist. Acc. of Scotland, as above.

ness in the cause of religion, he was frequently employed by the Presbytery of Chirnside to preach in those parishes where the people were disaffected to the Presbyterian interest, and to take possession of churches to which Presbyterian ministers could not, without difficulty, obtain access. In some instances, he preached in places of this sort, it is said, when showers of stones were breaking in upon him at the doors and windows. Such was the manner in which he was treated, in particular, by the people of Coldingham; and it was thought remarkable that the last sermon he ever preached was addressed to that people, from whom he had experienced this harsh treatment. The sermon, which was delivered on a Monday after the administration of the Lord's supper, had for its text these solemn words of reproof, Dan. v. 27, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

The same God, who sustained and honoured this faithful man amidst the various trials of his life, signally countenanced him at the approach of death. Eminent Christians have not always been enabled to bear a dying testimony in favour of religion, corresponding to the wishes and hopes of friends, who had beheld the striking evidences of religious principle exhibited in their life and conduct. But this worthy minister's deportment, in the immediate prospect of his change, was singularly calculated to glorify God, and to produce salutary impressions on his family, his people, and all around. He was seized with a fever, which terminated in his dissolution within the short space of two weeks. Fully anticipating the event, he set his house in order, and afterwards called for his children. Of the nine who were then alive, it was the privilege of six to be

present. With a heavenly authority, he exhorted them to choose the good part, and to cleave firmly to the cause of truth. As a dying man, and a dying father, he warmly recommended the good ways of God; told them that the advantages of serious religion infinitely outweigh all the difficulties that can possibly attend it; and assured them that as he never had repented, so more especially *then*, when standing on the brink of eternity, he did not repent, of any hardships he had endured in his Master's service. "I know," added he, "that I am going to heaven, and if you follow my footsteps, you and I shall have a happy meeting there, ere long." Having thus encouraged them to devote themselves to the service of God, he caused them, in succession, from the eldest to the youngest, to kneel down by his bed-side, and taking them in his arms, solemnly engaged them to be servants to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and his own God, and to keep his ways, as ever they would *look him in the face* in the great day of judgment. Then, like dying Jacob, he blessed them; and commending his wife and them to the care of divine providence, he committed his spirit into the hands of his God and Father, who had cared for him all his life long. In this joyful and triumphant manner he died on the 10th of August 1696, in the seventy-second year of his age. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

By the benign influences of the same divine Spirit, who caused this pious clergyman so nobly to exemplify the power of faith and of sanctified natural affection on the bed of death, his dying conduct, and his last counsels and charge seem to have been rendered truly

beneficial to several of his children. His son Ebenezer pleasantly refers to it in his diary as follows: "*Portmoak, Oct. 20, 1708.*—My wife and I began to discourse about spiritual matters; and the Lord made this conversation sweet to my soul. He helped me to speak of his goodness, and to declare the riches of his grace, in some measure, to my own soul. He made me tell how my father took engagements of me on his death-bed, and did cast me upon the providence of his God, and how the Lord had taken care of me, and never suffered me to want."—His son Ralph, in a record of his exercises on a day of personal humiliation and prayer, which he observed in November 1731, in reviewing "the many instances of the Lord's favour towards him, and his own rebellions against him,"—has this expression, among others: "I took special notice of *the Lord's drawing out my heart towards him, at my father's death.*" His daughter, Mrs. Balderston, in fine, then residing in Edinburgh, when relating her experience during the year 1696, after having mentioned the birth and baptism of one of her sons, adverts to the loss of her father in the following terms: "About a month after that, my father died, which I found very sharp to me; but his being kept faithful to the death, and the sweet and triumphant close he had, mitigated my grief."

His mortal remains were interred in the churchyard of Chirnside; and, as Dr. Anderson affirms, "not in the burial-ground of the Episcopal ministers, and as such, resigned to their successors in office, but in considerable separation from it."* That this arrangement

* Statist. Acc.

was adopted in consequence of any orders on the part of Mr. Erskine, is not alleged. Yet when we reflect on the state of ecclesiastical parties in that age, and on the many circumstances calculated to generate alienation of feeling between Episcopalians and Presbyterians, it is in no degree wonderful, that, for a time, there was a mutual aversion, even to "fraternity of coffins and bones, betwixt the clergy of the two churches."

A table-stone was placed over Mr. Erskine's grave, on which the following Latin Epitaph, with the subjoined translation, is engraved :

"M. S.
M. HENRICI ARESKINI,
PASTORIS CHIRNSIDIS,
Qui obiit 10 Augusti 1696.
Ætatis suæ 72.

Sanctus Areskinus, saxo qui conditur isto,
Est lapis æterni vivus in Æde Dei.
Non astu lapis hic, technâve volubilis ullâ,
Quippe fide, in Petra constabilitus erat.

Under this stone, there lies a Stone,
Living with God above :
Built on a Rock was such a one,
Whom force, nor fraud, could move."*

* This epitaph has been ascribed to Mr. Ralph Erskine, by the author of the Statistical Account of Chirnside ; who refers to it as a specimen of his "vein for Latin and English poetry." It is also placed at the front of a number of similar productions, inserted at the conclusion of Ralph's poetical works. But in the "Abbreviate," written by Ebenezer in 1715, it is expressly attributed to the Rev. John Dysert, of Coldingham. Very probably, however, Ralph, who was only eleven years old at the time of his father's death, made some alterations on it at a subsequent period.

This stone was renewed by Ebenezer and Ralph, when they visited that part of the country, upwards of thirty or forty years after the death of their father. The late Rev. Robert Campbell, of Stirling, when he made a visit to Chirnside in the year 1764, finding that the initial letters M. S. had been omitted or obliterated, was attentive enough to employ a workman to supply the defect.* About eight years since, an estimable inhabitant of Chirnside,† observing that the whole monument was greatly defaced, put himself to the trouble and expense of repairing it. In consequence of the laudable exertions, we have the pleasure to add, of the same individual, seconded by a few other gentlemen, both of the clergy and laity, an elegant monumental pillar, about twenty feet high, closely adjoining the original stone, was erected in the year 1825. The inscription on this new monument is as follows:—

ERECTED

By Subscription

1825.

In Memory of

THE REVEREND HENRY ERSKINE

A descendant of the family of Mar

And some time Minister of this parish

Who was eminently distinguished

By incorruptible integrity in private life

Undaunted zeal in the service of his heavenly Master

And steady attachment to the religious principles

Of the Church of Scotland,

* This fact, which, however trivial it may seem, is creditable to the memory of Mr. Campbell, we learned from an original letter, written by himself to Mrs. Scott, of Gateshall, in 1764.

† John Wilson, Esq.

At a time when the profession of these principles
 Often led to imprisonment and exile ;
 Both of which he himself endured
 With exemplary resignation and fortitude.

He was born at Dryburgh in the year 1624,
 Ordained at Cornhill in 1649,
 Ejected in 1662, and persecuted
 For nonconformity to prelacy,
 Admitted soon after the Revolution in 1688
 To be Minister of Chirnside,
 Where he continued in the faithful discharge
 Of his pastoral duty
 Till 10th August 1696,
 When his holy and exemplary life
 Terminated in a peaceful and triumphant death,
 In the 72d year of his age, and 47th of his ministry.*

Mr. Erskine was twice married. With regard to his first wife, we regret that our inquiries have been very unsuccessful. We know neither her name, nor her parentage. His marriage with her, however, took place, it appears, before the year 1653 ; and she lived for some time after his ejection from Cornhill : for, as has been stated, he declined the invitation of the good people of Harwich, to settle among them as their pastor, because Mrs. Erskine was unwilling to remove to so great a distance from her relatives, and her native country. For aught we know to the contrary, she may have been spared with him till about 1672.

The accounts of his second wife, Margaret Halcro, a native of Orkney, are much more ample. We are cre-

* It is intended, if it is not already done, to subjoin a few additional lines on the other side of the pillar, stating that Mr. Erskine was the father of Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, of the Secession.

dibly informed, that she was the great-grand-daughter of Harry Halcro of that ilk, and Lady Barbara Stewart; that Harry Halcro was a lineal descendant of Halcro, Prince of Denmark; and that Lady Barbara was the youngest daughter of Robert, Earl of Orkney, son of James V.* But Margaret Halcro possessed a far higher distinction than the blood of nobles or of kings can impart—sincere and decided piety. A certificate she received at the time of her leaving Orkney; an exact copy of which has been found in one of Mr. Ralph's Note-books, bears a satisfactory testimony at once to her pedigree, and to her pious and virtuous conduct.†

* This statement respecting Margaret Halcro's descent, was given a few years since to Mr. Walter Wardlaw, Glasgow, by Robert Nicolson, Esq. Kirkwall, Writer, and late Sheriff-substitute of that county, a gentleman well acquainted with the antiquities of Orkney.

† This ancient certificate is expressed in the following terms :—

“At the Kirk of Evie, May 27, 1666.

“To all and sundry into whose hands these presents shall come, be it known, that the bearer hereof, Margaret Halcro, lawful daughter to the deceased Hugh Halcro, in the isle of Weir, and Margaret Stewart, his spouse, hath lived in the parish of Evie from her infancy, in good fame and report; is a discreet, godly young woman, and, to our certain knowledge, free of all scandal, reproach, or blame. As also, that she is descended, of her father, of the house of Halcro, which is a very ancient and honourable family in the Orkneys—the noble and potent Earl of Early, and Lairds of Dun, in Angus; and by her mother, of the Laird of Burscobe, in Galloway. In witness whereof, we, the Minister and Clerk, have subscribed these presents at Evie, day, month, year of God, and place foresaid, and give way to all other noblemen, gentlemen, and ministers, to do the same.

(Sic Subscr.) Mr. MORISON, Minister of Evie.

GEORGE BALLENTINE.

JAMES TRAIL.

WILLIAM BALLENDEN. 1666.

Probably, she was born in the year 1647 ; removed from Orkney in 1666 ; and married Mr. Erskine about 1674, in the twenty-seventh year of her age. Amidst the hardships which he continued to suffer, for ten or twelve years posterior to the date of this second marriage, she adorned her profession by Christian magnanimity and patience. The bodily infirmities he was subject to, his pecuniary difficulties, and the severe persecutions he endured, supplied many opportunities of discovering, at the same time, her resignation to the will of God, and her affection and sympathy for her excellent husband. Even after his settlement at Chirnside, his living was scarcely adequate to the exigencies of his numerous family ; and after his decease, not possessing those advantages which, about half a century after, were secured for the widows and families of the Scottish clergy, Mrs. Erskine for some time experienced the trials incident to a necessitous and disconsolate widow, having a number of children to maintain and educate. Under these trying circumstances, however, she was enabled to conduct herself in a manner worthy of her character ; and the numberless efforts and anxieties of maternal affection were at last abundantly recompensed by the distinguished excellence and usefulness of her sons Ebenezer and Ralph, and by the filial gratitude she met with from them. She remained at Chirnside till summer 1704. After that period, we find her occasionally residing in Edinburgh ; but mostly in the houses of her sons, at Portmoak and Dunfermline. It was under Ebenezer's roof that she spent the greater part of her time : and here, after surviving her husband nearly thirty years, she resigned her earthly existence, with a " hope full of im-

mortality," on the 14th January 1725, in the seventy-eighth year of her age. Her remains were deposited in the chapel ground of Scotlandwell, a village in the parish of Portmoak; where an appropriate Latin inscription, somewhat defaced, is still to be seen, carved on a large horizontal stone, which her sons erected in memory of a mother, endeared by her sufferings in the cause of religion, as well as by her maternal feelings and Christian graces. The stone itself, which lies parallel to a similar monument, at the distance of only one foot and a half, commemorative of Alison Turpie, Ebenezer's first wife, is now considerably dilapidated, and ought to be repaired. *

It pleased divine providence to give Mr. Erskine of Chirnside children, both by his first and his second wife. Though we cannot state precisely the number of either of the two families, we know that a son of the second marriage died a short time before his father, and that of the rest, there were, in all, nine that survived him.

We have no positive accounts of the children of the first Mrs. Erskine, except with regard to two of them, a son and a daughter. The son, whose name was PHILIP, made choice of the clerical profession; but, contrary to the wishes and example of his father, conformed to the Church of England; and, after holding other situations, became Rector of Knaresdale, in the county of Northumberland. Our only source of information respecting this member of the family, is a copy of a letter found in one of Ralph's manuscripts, which he wrote to Philip in the year 1719, after having re-

* See the inscription in the Appendix, No. II.

ceived from him, by a private opportunity, a brief memorandum, stating in what manner any of his brothers in Scotland might, if they chose, transmit a letter to him. From Ralph's communication, which is expressed in candid and affectionate terms, it appears that he had never even seen the Rector but at Chirnside, when he was so young a child that he could recollect nothing of him; and that, from their having received no answer to a letter which Ebenezer, while chaplain to the Earl of Rothes, had written to him many years before, and committed to the care of two ladies, a Mrs. Dykes and a Mrs. Kerr, who assured him they were sisters to his brother's wife, they had both been apt to conclude that "his differing in principle had made him indifferent to correspondence with them." "But now, having considered your memorandum," continues Ralph, "I began to allege, that, in all probability, such a letter had never come to your hand. But, however that were, and though I much regret what I cannot help, that your having joined in communion with a church, if not opposite to, yet many ways distinct from this, has, I fear, rendered it impracticable or improbable, that we can be brethren in judgment and opinion, as well as in nature and blood; yet I reckon a brotherly communication to be duty, abstracting from all known and open differences that are betwixt the Church of Scotland, and that whereof you are now, as I perceive, an eminent member; especially since I hope there is a cordial agreement between us in fundamental points, that are of absolute necessity to eternal salvation. And the reason why I hope so, is not only because, so long as the church of England adhere to, and rightly explain their thirty-nine Articles, I do not see that they swerve

so much from the scriptural standard, or differ from us, in point of doctrine, as we reckon they do in other things; but also because I may well suppose you wanted not the best opportunities to imbibe the best of principles in your education. This, therefore, is to show how willing I am to correspond with you, to hear of your welfare, and to be informed anent the state of your family." After some details regarding his own family, and other relatives, and his manner of discharging his office in the large parish of Dunfermline, he concludes with these words: "Saluting you with all due and brotherly respect, together with your consort and children, and desiring to hear from you.—Wishing the Lord may guide you into all truth, and bless you and your's with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, I remain, Rev. Dear Brother, your's most affectionately, R. E."—Whether this fraternal epistle met with the attention it deserved, or whether any farther correspondence took place between the English Rector and his half-brothers, the two Scotch ministers, we are unable to say.

It is happily in our power to give more satisfactory information regarding JEAN, the daughter of the first Mrs. Erskine. She is the Mrs. Balderston mentioned repeatedly above. Her father, amidst all his pecuniary difficulties, not only made conscience of giving his children a religious and moral education, but exerted himself most laudably to furnish them with those means of literary improvement, which might qualify them for holding respectable situations in life. Endowed with that talent and activity by which the advantages of education are turned to a good account, Jean first acquitted herself creditably as a governess; and

then opened a school in Edinburgh, where, for a few years, she taught young ladies with considerable reputation and success. About the year 1687, she gave her hand to Mr. George Balderston, a surgeon, and sometime one of the magistrates of the city, a man of decided piety and excellent temper, who was spared with her till December 1720. Having survived her husband about eighteen years, she died on the 19th October 1738, in the 86th year of her age, leaving a son named George, who has descendants still residing in Edinburgh. *

At what time, and by what means, Mrs. Balderston was first impressed with the absorbing importance of religion, has been shown from her own statement. † The vital principle then implanted in her heart, became increasingly vigorous and fruitful, till she deserved the eulogy given her by her brother Ralph, in a brief memorandum of her death—"an eminent Christian, of signal experience." From her own diary, which we have had the satisfaction to peruse, it abundantly appears that she was a most attentive hearer of the gospel; delighted in all the institutions of religion, public and private; watched the movements of the heart with a vigilant eye; and was peculiarly earnest and persevering in prayer; exemplary in every relation, and equally distinguished for humility and fortitude. By an extensive circle of Christian acquaintances, as well in the higher as the lower walks of life, she was held in

* William C. Balderston, Esq. W. S.; and the son and daughters of Dr. Simpson, Tron Church, by the first Mrs. Simpson, are the great grandchildren of Mrs. Balderston.

† Pages 13, 14.

great estimation as “a mother in Israel.” It was her honour and happiness, for example, to enjoy the intimate and confidential friendship of the Rev. Thomas Boston of Ettrick, and of the pious Colonel John Blackader, Deputy-Governor of Stirling Castle. Mr. Boston, in his *Memoirs*, makes repeated mention of her in the most favourable terms. Let the following quotation suffice. When narrating the circumstances of his visit to Edinburgh in December 1719, and alluding to his elaborate treatise on the Hebrew Points, * he thus expresses himself respecting her: “Mrs. Balderston, to whose prayers I recommended my study of the accentuation, with the rest of my case, was the daughter of Mr. Henry Erskine, whom I account my father in Christ, and a person eminent for piety, Christian experience, and communion with God.” † Col. Blackader regarded her with the same esteem, and put a similar value on her prayers; considering them as, under Providence, a powerful means of defence, amidst the perils of war, and the moral hazards of a military life. In the year 1705, he wrote to her a letter from the continent, dated “Treves, May 19th,” which contains the following expressions: “I know I need not bid you mind me; for, as you tell me, I am laid on you as a charge, that you must mind me; and pray go on, for you are well paid for your pains. You serve a good Master, and get something for yourself, when you ply the throne of grace for your friends. The Lord’s blessing rest on you, and your family.” ‡

* *Stigmatologia*, &c.

† *Memoirs of T. Boston*, A. M. Period xi. p. 358. See also p. 364.

‡ *Crichton’s Life and Diary of Col. J. B.* ch. xi. pp. 241–2. See Appendix, No. III.

Of Mr. Erskine's family by Margaret Halcro, his second wife, three, we know, were sons. Ebenezer and Ralph, the two younger, were preserved alive for eminent usefulness in the church. Henry, an older brother, a promising young man, died, prematurely, in the twentieth year of his age; and his remains were deposited in the house of silence, by his sorrowing father, exactly a month preceding the termination of his own mortal career. Our information respecting this young Henry is but limited. He was born, as may be gathered from his epitaph, in the year 1676; while the lancet and sand-glass, carved on a small perpendicular stone, situated hard by his father's new monument, sufficiently confirm the tradition, that he had directed his attention to medical studies. The entire inscription is as follows:

Young HENRY ERSKINE'S

Corpse lies here.

(O Stone, keep in record
his dust with thee.

His soul above, we hope,
is with the Lord.)

Who departed this life July 9.
1696. of his age 20.

Margaret Halcro had several daughters; but their number and their names, can scarcely be ascertained. Of the nine children, including both families, that were alive at the time of their father's death, four have just been named—Philip, Jean, Ebenezer, and Ralph. With regard to the other five, of most of them no vestige can now be traced. The private manuscripts we have seen, supply no intelligence respecting them; and no paro-

chial register of births and deaths—which, had such a record existed, would probably have included notices of any of them that might have died in childhood—was at that period, kept at Chirnside.* One of Ralph's Note-books, however, contains the substance of a sermon on Zech. xiv. 8. preached, about the commencement of the eighteenth century, by a Mr. More, whom he styles "my brother-in-law;" which seems to imply that Mrs. More was a sister of his. Another sister, whose name was probably Margaret, resided a number of years with her brother at Dunfermline; and died there at the beginning of October 1713. This sister appears to have greatly endeared herself to Ebenezer and Ralph; and in a subsequent part of this volume, we shall have occasion to notice the tender solicitude which, during her last illness, these affectionate brothers jointly manifested respecting her eternal welfare.

To these accounts of Henry Erskine's family, it seems right to add some slight notices of several Presbyterian ministers, whom he numbered amongst his particular friends, and endeared fellow-sufferers. One of these was his nephew, the Rev. WILLIAM ERSKINE, formerly mentioned.† We have seen, that, about the year 1675, when this good man acted the part of a Barnabas to his cousin, Jean Erskine, he was residing, probably unmolested, at Dryburgh; where, we doubt not, the uncle and nephew cheered and edified each other, by the frequent and delightful intercourse of Christian friendship.

* We are informed, on good authority, that there was no registration of births, deaths, and marriages, in the parish of Chirnside, at that time, nor for many years after.

† Page 14.

But by venturing occasionally to preach the Gospel, William incurred the displeasure of the existing authorities, and was, in consequence, subjected to severe and protracted imprisonment. Very probably he had suffered in this form for several years, prior to the time of that interview with Henry's daughter; and, after a short interval of liberty, he was apprehended, it appears, and condemned to confinement in the Castle of Stirling. "On the 3d August, 1676," says Wodrow, "Mr. William Erskine and the laird of Bedlane, *prisoners in Stirling Castle*, are ordered to be transported to Dumbarton."* The same valuable historian informs us, with respect to this "worthy presbyterian minister," as he is pleased to call him, that orders were given for his release in the year 1679: "Mr. William Erskine, prisoner in Stirling more than three years, (some papers before me say he was in prison, with little intermission, full *ten* years,) is ordered to be liberate."† There is ground to conclude, however, that these orders had been either disregarded, or speedily reversed; for, in a subsequent chapter of the same history, the author makes the following statement: "April 8, 1684, Mr. William Erskine presents a petition to the Council, showing "that he had been now *seven* years close prisoner in Blackness Castle and other places, and that merely for preaching the Gospel, as he had received power from Christ; and that he was now turned valetudinary—therefore craving the Council's compassion." All they do, is to allow him to walk about the castle, and take the air with a keeper."‡ Yet some time after, he

* Vol. i. Book ii. ch. 11. p. 425.

† Vol. ii. Book iii. ch. 3. p. 110.

‡ Vol. ii. Book iii. ch. 8. p. 352.

reaped the benefit of the Act of Indemnity passed by King James. Mrs. Balderston, in her Diary, accordingly, having detailed the circumstances of her marriage, thus continues ; “At that time there came some enlargement to the people of God, and my cousin, Mr. Areskine, came out of prison, and came and stayed at my house a pretty while ; which was sweet and edifying company to me.” Soon after the Revolution, he was admitted minister of the Tron Church, Edinburgh ; but his constitution having been materially injured by his previous sufferings, he rested from his labours after a period of about ten years ; and in 1701, was succeeded by the Rev. George Meldrum. Elizabeth West expresses her esteem and affection for him, in the following terms : “I was for a considerable time under the ministry of Mr. William Erskine. All that I can observe during the time he preached among us was, that I attained to a great delight in hearing the word, which wrought upon my affections, that I durst not neglect secret prayer ; where sometimes I would be very tender, and shed some tears ; then I thought there was no doubt but I was converted. It pleased the Lord to remove this faithful servant by death.”*

The Rev. WILLIAM VEITCH—mentioned also in a foregoing part of this Memoir,—who, subsequently to the Revolution, ministered first at Peebles, and then at Dumfries, though not a relative, was a much esteemed friend of Henry Erskine. The mutual attachment subsisting betwixt them, founded in congeniality of views and dispositions, was strengthened by the familiar intercourse of several years, and by the sufferings which both endured in the same sacred cause. Mr.

* Memoirs of Eliz. West, p. 2.

Erskine having been one of a small group of presbyterian ministers, by whom he was privately ordained in the days of persecution, Mr. Veitch never ceased to revere him as a spiritual father; and many years after his death, he expressed his regard for his memory, as we have noticed, by writing that account of remarkable providences concerning him, which is still preserved. To detail here the particulars of Mr. Veitch's history, would, nevertheless, be quite superfluous. With sincere pleasure we refer the reader, not only to Mr. Wodrow's account,* but also to the memoir of that pious clergyman written by himself, lately edited and ably illustrated by a celebrated biographer. According to a statement by Dr. M'Crie, Mr. Veitch, at the time of his admission to the charge of Peebles, September 18, 1690, "promised to bring a certificate from a famous minister's hand, now in Scotland, who was one of that number who gave him ordination." "I have no doubt," adds the learned writer, "that Mr. Henry Erskine is the person from whom he offered to procure a certificate. In the paper which he appears to have drawn up for the use of Wodrow, Mr. Veitch states, that Mr. Erskine assisted at his ordination. They were intimate friends: the former was frequently at Mr. Veitch's house in Northumberland, and, on these occasions, used to entertain him and his wife with anecdotes respecting the straits into which he was often brought with his numerous family, and the singular manner in which he was extricated from them."†

Amongst the valued friends of Mr. Erskine, we must

* Vol. ii. book iii. chap. i. pp. 5-8.

† Memoirs of Mr. William Veitch and George Brysson, written by themselves, &c. p. 203.

certainly include the Rev. LUKE OGLE; who, as related above, was his fellow-prisoner at Wooler and Newcastle. After his settlement at Chirnside too, they probably assisted each other frequently in the ministrations of the sanctuary. They were lovely in their lives, and in death they were scarcely divided; both having gone to their long home in the course of the same year 1696,—Mr. Ogle in April, and Mr. Erskine in August. Mr. Ogle was minister for some time at Inghram, and thence removed to Berwick-upon-Tweed, where he discharged his duty with exemplary faithfulness, and had “a great interest in the affections of the people.” His unbending fidelity, however, to what he esteemed the cause of truth, and the bold testimonies he bore against the errors of popery and prelacy, exposed him to violent persecution. Some time after his ejection in 1662, he went to London, and complained of several instances of cruel treatment he had met with, to General Monk, who, when residing at Berwick, had shown him much kindness and respect. The General told him, that if he would conform, he would use his interest to make him a Bishop; but, if he refused, he could do him no service. Mr. Ogle replied, in the spirit of meekness and humility, that the summit of his ambition was to live peaceably among his own people, but if that could not be obtained, he must submit to Providence. For some years he preached privately at Bousden, where he had a small estate; but even there he did not escape annoyance. A few years before the Revolution, an invitation being given him in consequence of the liberty granted by King James, he returned to Berwick, and collected a numerous congregation; and here he remained till his death,

which took place in the sixty-seventh year of his age. Though called to Kelso, and afterwards to Edinburgh, nothing could induce him to leave Berwick, "where God had signally supported, owned, and blessed him." "He was a man of great learning," says Dr. Calamy, "and particularly well-skilled in ecclesiastical history." He was a laborious, judicious, and affectionate preacher; and a wise and prudent person for government. He well understood the art of preaching to all sorts of hearers; could inform the judicious without racking the understanding of the less knowing, and could teach the ignorant so as to edify the most intelligent.*

The Rev. WILLIAM VIOLAND is also entitled to a place among Henry Erskine's associates. This was the name of the minister whom he employed to baptize his son Ralph, in the month of April 1685;† and in all probability he is the same to whom Wodrow gives the name of *William Violant*. In that author's roll of Scottish clergymen that were non-conformists to prelacy, he is mentioned as minister of Ferry-port-on-Craig, in the Presbytery of St. Andrew's, and Synod of Fife; and as one of those who were ejected from their parishes by the act of council passed at Glasgow 1662.‡ From another part of that history, it appears he afterwards became an indulged minister at Camnethan, but again felt the bitterness of cruel persecution. A company of people going home from a conventicle at Blackloch, protected by a few armed men, had passed by his place of worship on a Sabbath evening; and be-

* See Dr. Calamy's account, vol. ii. pp. 500-503.

† See the account of R. Erskine prefixed to the 8vo. edition of his works.

‡ Wodrow's Hist. vol. i. Ap. No. 37, p. 77.

cause the good man had not deemed it proper to violate at once the rights of conscience and the sanctity of the Lord's day, by giving immediate information against those "rebels," added to the heinous delinquency of preaching in some instances "without his parish church," and of baptizing children belonging to other parishes, the merciless rulers determined no longer to show him forbearance. His Majesty's Privy Council ordered him to be committed to prison; and, on the 30th July 1684, they pronounced sentence against him, declaring his indulgence to be null and void, and obliging him to leave the kingdom. Wodrow describes him as envied for his uncommon learning and worth, and distinguished for the meekness of his temper, and the usefulness of his ministrations.* Shortly after the Council had condemned him to exile, he seems to have removed to the north of England, where he had the opportunity of seeing Mr. Erskine, and was no doubt refreshed by his sympathy and friendship. He survived the Revolution; but the particulars of his subsequent history we have not learned.

The only other friend of Mr. Erskine that remains to be noticed here, is the Rev. JOHN DYSERT, of Coldingham, who not only delighted to associate with him when alive, but expressed his esteem, after his death, as we have seen, by composing an inscription for his tomb. He was ordained minister of the parish of Langton, and afterwards translated to Coldingham. Fervent piety, a benevolent spirit, and affable manners, appear to have been united in his character. Mr. Boston makes grateful mention of the warm friendship he ex-

* Wodrow's Hist. vol. ii. B. iii. ch. 8, sect. 2.

perienced from him, about the time of his settlement at Simprin. "I had no heart," says he, "to visit the ministers, knowing none of them I could unbosom myself to, save Mr. Colden at Dunse, and Mr. Dysert at Coldingham."*

To the lovers of Christian truth, it would have probably been gratifying to learn, that the subject of this memoir had published some sermons, or other theological works. From a laudable curiosity, they might have wished to see a specimen of those heavenly discourses which were blessed for the conversion of Mr. Boston and others. Most probably, however, Mr. Erskine, like the celebrated John Knox, judged himself better qualified to do good to the souls of men by the exertions of the living voice, than by the productions of his pen. None of his compositions, so far as the writer knows, were ever published, either by himself or by his descendants. Most of them seem to have shared the fate too common to valuable manuscripts, written by persons eminent for learning and piety. Relics of this description, alas! are often scattered and lost, soon after the decease of their authors. If not recklessly committed to the flames, or, by a sordid economy, sold for waste paper, they are apt to be thrown aside into damp and airless corners, where they minister to the sustenance of moths, and speedily become illegible and useless. Whatever value may be placed on them by their original heirs, in the course of one or two generations, they are frequently neglected, and suffered to perish. In some instances too, though highly prized

* Boston's Memoirs, p. 62. See also pp. 64, 84.

by their possessors, they are unhandsomely and unjustly detained by individuals, to whom they have been generously lent.

With regard to Mr. Erskine, it has been stated that he “left behind him several manuscripts, elucidating difficult passages of scripture. But these having been written in Latin, none of them were ever published.”* The manuscripts here referred to, no doubt, include the Latin Compend of Theology, formerly mentioned.† That work is, in our estimation, orthodox, correct, and very comprehensive; but we have no cause to wonder that its publication has not been attempted, since the theological student has access to many valuable compends in the same language.‡ With the exception of another volume, also noticed before, consisting of extracts from various authors, we have not had the satisfaction to see any more of his manuscripts; and, perhaps, these two volumes are the only ones extant. Whilst none of this faithful minister’s compositions, either in Latin or English, have been given to the world, it is cheering, however, to reflect, that the precious fruits of his ministry are imperishable, and that his “name shall be held in everlasting remembrance.” His “lack of service,” too, in this respect, has, in adorable providence, been happily supplied by his sons, Ebenezer and Ralph, whom he cheerfully devoted to the christian ministry, whose future usefulness in the church he anticipated with pleasure on the bed of death; and whose evangelical and devotional writings

* Chalmers’s Gen. Biograph. Dict.

† Page 15.

‡ Viz. those of Riissenius, Pictet, Marckius, and others.

have not only proved a source of edification and comfort to vast numbers of the pious for nearly a century past, but are likely, by the blessing of God, to be productive of great benefit to an extensive circle of readers during the course of many succeeding generations.*

* See the Appendix, No. IV.

THE END OF REV. HENRY ERSKINE'S MEMOIR.

THE LIFE AND DIARY

OF THE

REV. EBENEZER ERSKINE, A.M.

FATHER OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.

THE LIFE AND DIARY
OF THE
REV. EBENEZER ERSKINE, A. M.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Erskine's Birth—His name Ebenezer—Education at the University of Edinburgh—Becomes Chaplain to the Earl of Rothes—License—Ordination at Portmoak—Marriage.

THE REVEREND EBENEZER ERSKINE, as has been stated in the preceding Memoir, was a son of Henry Erskine of Chirnside and Margaret Halcro. His birth took place on the 22d June 1680. He was about four years younger than his brother Henry, who died in the twentieth year of his age; and nearly five years older than Ralph.

With regard to the spot of Ebenezer's nativity, different accounts have been given. In a short notice of him, inserted in a voluminous work, it is affirmed that he "was born in the prison of the Bass;"* and this statement has been adopted by subsequent writers. A respectable biographer, having correctly stated that Mr.

* Chalmers's Gen. Biog. Dict. vol. xiii.

Henry Erskine was sentenced to the Bass, but reprieved on promising to leave the kingdom, thus continues: "His wife, however, appears to have been a prisoner in the Bass; for I find that Ebenezer Erskine, the father of the Secession, was born here, and hence he got his name, which means a stone of help or remembrance, (*Gazett. of Scotland.*")* To whatever cause the report that this venerated person was born in that far-famed rock may be ascribed, or however much the name Ebenezer may have contributed to its currency, there seems little room to doubt, that it is one of those popular but ill-founded traditions, respecting the birth of eminent men, which have originated in precipitance, and been upheld by credulity. Most probably he was born at Dryburgh. This appears from the circumstance, that so far as is known, his parents, during the year in which he was born, were residing at that village, free from any considerable annoyance. It was not before the year 1682, that his father was seized by Urquhart of Meldrum, and sentenced to imprisonment in the Bass. That sentence having been remitted in the way formerly mentioned, we have no evidence that either of his parents was, at any time, a prisoner in the Bass. It may be added, in fine, that though Ebenezer, in his Diary, repeatedly takes notice of the interesting import of his name, he never once alludes to the Bass as the place of his birth.

The name Ebenezer, however, was probably given him by his parents, in testimony of their fervent gratitude to that God, whose goodness and mercy had fol-

* Crichton's Memoirs of the Rev. John Blackader, pp. 380-1.

lowed them amidst their numerous hardships, and constrained them to erect a pillar of remembrance, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." * This significant name appears to have been useful to himself, as well as to them; reminding him of his obligations to praise God for merciful interpositions in his favour, and to place an unsuspecting confidence in his providence and grace, in every possible emergency. In a pious letter to his sister, Mrs. Balderston, dated April 13, 1712, after alluding to the apprehensions excited amongst the Scottish clergy, by certain measures then adopted by the British cabinet, he expresses himself in the following terms: "I would *fain* remember my own name Ebenezer, and hope that the Lord will be a help, and that he will do all for me in the evil day." † At another time, having recorded a narrow escape which he made June 9, 1721, when his horse, immediately after he had placed himself on the back of the animal, struck him violently on the face, and threw him backwards on the ground, he adds:—"O let me never forget his goodness. *Ebenezer*; hitherto hath the Lord helped."

The particulars of Ebenezer's early life are but imperfectly known. It is undoubted, however, that the proofs of capacity and indications of piety which he exhibited in childhood and youth, were highly gratifying to his excellent father, and that his views were, from the first, directed to the sacred office. Some time prior to his death, Henry Erskine was "heard to say that he would desire to live no longer than to see his son Ebenezer, then in the 16th year of his age, succeeding

* 1 Sam. vii. 12.

† See the whole letter, ch. iii.

him in the work of the ministry." * Under the vigilant and affectionate superintendence of his father, he was instructed in the first principles of literature, it is likely, at the public schools of Chirnside and its vicinity. Having received the preparatory education deemed necessary, he was enrolled as a student at the university of Edinburgh; where, after a course of four years devoted to classical and philosophical studies, which even then was required of all candidates for the ministry in Scotland, he applied during five sessions to theology.

In the records of the university we have found the following entry: "Ebenezer Areskine laureated 25 June 1697." He seems therefore to have commenced his academical career in November 1693, in the 14th year of his age. The following statement, indeed, is made, regarding him, in a late publication: "From the records of the Town Council of Edinburgh, it appears that in 1698, he was a bursar at the university of Edinburgh, and presented by Pringle of Torwoodlee." † Yet since, according to the college records, he received the degree of Master of Arts in June 1697, the part of the Town Council's Books here referred to, probably relates to a bursary presented to him, as a student of theology. Possibly he was also a bursar while he attended the literary and philosophical classes.

The University of Edinburgh had, even at that period, attained very considerable celebrity. Dr. Gilbert Rule, a man of excellent moral and religious character, and of respectable talents and learning, was Principal. The Regents were Messrs. Herbert Kennedy and John

* Abbrev. of the Life of Mr. H. Erskine.

† Bower's Hist. Univ. Edinb. vol. ii. p. 284, note.

Row; Mr. Lawrence Dundas, who for many years taught Latin with great reputation; and Mr. William Law of Elvingston, who was made Professor of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy. The mathematics were taught by Mr. James Gregory, the esteemed successor of his brother, Mr. David Gregory, who was the first European Professor that illustrated the philosophy of Newton in any public seminary, and became Professor of Astronomy at Oxford, 1691. From 1694 to 1702, Mr. Alexander Rule, son of the Principal, was Professor of Hebrew; and young men were enjoined to study that language before commencing divinity. The theological Chair was ably filled by Dr. George Campbell, who succeeded Dr. Strachan 1690, and died 1701. Eminent piety, learning, and modesty, were united in the character of this Dr. Campbell; and, in the library attached to the Divinity Hall, of which he was the founder, and which at his death consisted of 996 volumes, he left a noble proof of his benevolence and public spirit.*

Placed under the tuition of these learned Professors, Ebenezer seems to have pursued his studies, with unwearied assiduity, and distinguished success. It may be deemed no slight evidence of his proficiency, and of the estimation in which he was held by his teachers, that he was recommended to John, Earl of Rothes, to be chaplain and tutor in his Lordship's family. The Earl was one of the most respectable noblemen of his age. By his religious and virtuous conduct, and by his ardent attachment to the liberties of the people, he

* See Bower's Hist. Un. Edin. vol. i. pp. 318-385. For some account of Dr. Campbell, see also the Christian Instructor, vol. xxv. pp. 377-8.

acquired great esteem. He was grandson of the Duke of Rothes, who made a figure in the reign of Charles II. He took his seat in Parliament in the year 1700, and, after the Union, was repeatedly chosen one of the sixteen representatives of the Scottish Peerage in the British Parliament. After the accession of the House of Hanover, he was appointed Vice-Admiral of Scotland, and Governor of Stirling Castle. When the rebellion 1715 broke out, he signalized himself by his zeal and gallantry in opposing the rebels. Each of the first seven years succeeding the accession of George I. he was chosen to represent his Majesty as High Commissioner to the Church of Scotland. During the sitting of the last General Assembly at which he held this honour, he became indisposed ; and he died on the 9th May 1722, in the forty-sixth year of his age, sincerely regretted by his friends and his country.* For several months before his death, he suffered severe attacks of trouble ; and his conduct, in the prospect of that event, was truly exemplary. He expressed an entire acquiescence in the gospel method of salvation ; discovered a lively faith and great resignation ; and humbly entreated ministers and friends, who approached his death-bed, to deal plainly with him, and tell him candidly if they thought his faith was sincere, or if it was only presumption. He repeatedly called his family together, prayed fervently with them, and exhorted them to mind religion as the one thing needful. He was often observed, like dying Stephen, fixing his eyes intent on heaven, offering up his earnest supplications to God,

* See Douglas's Peerage of Scotland, vol. ii. and Struthers's Hist. Scot. vol. i. pp. 220-510.

and he expired in the very act of prayer, when his "thoughts began to warm." In a word," says Col. Blackader, who was a delighted eye-witness of the interesting scene, "I never saw any man die more as a Christian hero, with so much natural fortitude, and such lively faith. He was pleasant in his life, and pleasant in his death. O keep the impression strong upon my heart for ever, of what I have seen and heard here." *

We have not ascertained the precise time when Mr. Erskine became chaplain to the family of Rothes. One of his manuscripts, however, contains notes of a sermon preached at Leslie, by the Rev. John Shaw, minister of that parish, October 19, 1701. He seems, therefore, to have entered the family some time before that date; and from the terms in which he is mentioned in the minutes of Kirkaldy Presbytery, it is clear that he remained in it, at least till he received licence in February 1703. That he acquitted himself in a manner that met the entire approbation of the Earl, appears from the friendship he continued ever after to show him. Among other marks of his kind attention, we find that in 1712, when, from conscientious motives, he had exposed himself to the penalties denounced against those clergymen that declined taking the oath of abjuration, his Lordship felt a lively interest in his safety and comfort. We have discovered a short-hand draught of a letter to this nobleman, bearing date "*Portmoak, November 6, 1712,*" in which the writer gratefully acknowledges the

* Crichton's Life and Diary of Col. Blackader, pp. 523-526. See also a copy of a long letter respecting the Earl from the Colonel to Mr. Wodrow, Ch. Instr. vol. xxiv. pp. 766-8.

friendly services he had done him. What follows is an extract, and nearly the whole, of this letter :

“ MY LORD,

“ I intended, according to promise, to have paid my respects this day to your Lordship. But having returned from my journey only *yester-night*, and being fatigued with travelling, I beg your dispensation as to this. I return your Lordship my thankful acknowledgments for supplying my charge by Mr. Clow on Sabbath last, and for the singular care your Lordship has on all occasions, and particularly at this juncture, exercised towards me, and my small family. All the return I am capable to make, is to pray for Heaven’s blessing upon your Lordship, and your family. The occasion of my returning so soon to this place is, that I find, by conversing with people of intelligence, to whom I represented my unfortunate case, that I am not in any hazard by preaching. . . . I find that all the non-jurants, especially through this part of the kingdom, are preaching ; and though I should desist for two or three Sabbaths, (which yet I have not full freedom to do,) it could avail nothing, unless I laid aside preaching for two or three months at least, till the Parliament declare their mind regarding the non-jurors, which cannot be suddenly expected. Upon all which considerations, I entreat your Lordship will not be offended, if I take my hazard in preaching on, with the rest of my brethren, who are in the same unfortunate circumstances. If your Lordship will please to express your mind in this matter by a line from Mr. Clow, it will be a favour. And I must freely own that had I not dreaded your Lordship’s displeasure more than the legal penalty, I had run the risk of the latter, Sabbath

last. So that I beg earnestly your Lordship may make me easy as to this matter, and allow me to remain, in all duty, my Lord, your Lordship's most humble and obliged servant,

“EBENEZER ERSKINE.”*

The Earl of Rothes was blessed with a numerous family; but, as his marriage took place only in April 1697, Mr. Erskine could not have more than two or three of his children to teach, including the eldest son John, who succeeded his father in 1722, and survived till December 1767. His chief employment in the Earl's house was no doubt to conduct the domestic worship, and to give religious and moral instruction to the servants. His duties as a tutor and chaplain did not induce him, at any rate, to neglect the studies necessary to prepare him for that higher and more responsible office to which he aspired.

Considerable memorials of his youthful diligence are furnished by several manuscripts, still extant, containing not only copious extracts from a variety of works in theology and church history, but also numerous notes of discourses he had heard in different places, particularly at Edinburgh and Leslie.† In those times the practice of taking notes of sermons at church prevailed very much among religious people, and especially among students; and it seems to have been countenanced by ministers and teachers of youth. The regulations of the University of Edinburgh had probably their own influence, in supporting this custom. The students

* This letter is copied from a short-hand note-book begun 1712, and entitled “Book 13th of Miscellany Sermons.” Some of the expressions omitted are scarcely legible.

† See Append. No. V.

were carefully guarded, and kept under a species of monastic discipline. During the period of attendance on the classes, they formed a strictly organized body, residing within the walls of the college. On Sabbath they attended divine service together, under the eye of the Professors; and sometime after public worship was concluded, they met in several classes, to repeat notes of what they had heard, with passages of sacred writ they were expected to learn.* This mode of culture, though afterwards discontinued as rigid and illiberal, and as too closely resembling the method adopted in popish seminaries, was unquestionably calculated to create habits of attention to sermons, and to promote an intimate acquaintance with at least the letter of scripture. To students in theology, it must have proved, in some respects, highly beneficial. Owing in a great degree, probably, to early habit, the subject of these memoirs was, through life, a very attentive hearer of the word. Though capable himself of composing excellent discourses, he listened most devoutly to the instructions delivered by his brethren; and even many years after his ordination, he sometimes committed his recollections of them to writing. “The hand of the diligent maketh rich;” and in whatever abundance the treasures of knowledge have been acquired, it is the part of a truly wise and humble man to improve every fresh opportunity of augmenting his store.

The usual course of study being accomplished, the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, within whose bounds Ebenezer Erskine resided, encouraged him to go forward. A

* Bower's Hist. Univ. Edin. vol. ii. p. 36, &c.

minute bearing date, Kirkaldy, September 24, 1702, contains the following sentence : “ The Presbytery appoint Mr. Shaw to speak to the Earl of Rothes anent his lordship’s chaplain entering upon trials.” Exercises for trial, for license to preach the Gospel, were soon after prescribed to him. He was appointed to prepare a homily on Isaiah xlv. 22 ; a popular sermon on Psalm cxix. 80 ; a critical exercise and addition on Rom. ix. 17, 18 ; and a Latin discourse “ on the object of justifying faith ;” * to give account of the 43d Psalm in Hebrew, and the Greek *ad aperturam libri* ; and to answer catechetical questions. He and another young man, named Mr. Henry Hamilton, were taken on trials at the same time, appeared together before the Presbytery at their successive meetings, Oct. 22, Nov. 19, and Dec. 17, 1702 ; and Jan. 14, 1703 ; and both received license at Kirkaldy, Feb. 11, 1703. A certificate of Mr. Erskine’s license, neatly written on parchment by the Rev. Thomas Russell, Presbytery Clerk, and Minister of the parish of Kennoway, is still in the possession of one of his descendants. It is as follows :

“ At Kirkcaldie, the Eleventh day of Februar 1703.

“ THE PRESBYTRIE OF KIRKCALDIE, considering that MASTER EBENEZER ARESKIN has, at several times, passed through before them all the ordinar parts of tryall as a Probationer, with all which they were well satisfied. And having this day in their presence publicly owned and acknowledged the Confession of Faith as the confession of his faith, and promised to subscribe the same when required ; owned and acknowledged the present Presbyterian Church government by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, to

* De objecto fidei justificantis.

be the only government agreeable to the word of God ; promising to adhere thereto, and to do nothing directly or indirectly in prejudice thereof ; and that he should endeavour to maintain and promote the same to the utmost of his power ; and that he should follow no divisive course, and be subject to this and other Presbyteries, where Providence should cast his lot.—THEY did and hereby do LICENTIATE the said MASTER EBENEZER ARESKIN to preach the Gospel of Christ, as a Probationer.

Extracted forth of the Records of the said Presbytrie by

T. RUSSELL, Clk. Presb.

These young men immediately received appointments from the Presbytery to preach in vacant parishes, under their inspection. Mr. Erskine's first appointment was at Dysart, the second Sabbath after he was licensed, being Feb. 23d. Here then, so far as we know, this celebrated preacher first opened his mouth, as an authorised herald of the cross, to publish those glad tidings of salvation, which for a long series of years, by the divine aid, he continued to proclaim, with increasing ability, reputation, and success. Judging from the minutes of Presbytery, Dysart, Kirkaldy, and Portmoak, were the only places where he was appointed to preach, previously to his ordination, with the exception of a Sabbath at Markinch,—“Mr. Drew being to attend the Commission of the Assembly.”

His first appearances at Portmoak took place on the last Sabbath of March, the third of April, and the first of May, 1703. That parish having become vacant by the translation of the Rev. John Wilson, who was admitted at Kirkaldy the 22d of October preceding, the

people were solicitous to obtain another pastor ; and being highly pleased with the ministrations and character of Mr. Erskine, he received an unanimous call to discharge the office of the ministry among them, from the heritors and elders, with the cheerful acquiescence of the whole population. The Rev. Mr. Wardrope of Ballingry *moderated* at Portmoak on Wednesday the 26th May. At that period, a call was no vain or unmeaning ceremony. The Presbytery, indeed, authorized the moderator and another minister respectfully to inform Sir William Bruce of the appointment of the moderation ; but neither Sir William, nor any other individual, presumed to exercise the right of patronage. At a meeting of Presbytery subsequently held at Dysart on the 10th June, the moderator gave in his report. The laird of Gospetrie, William Arnot, John Whyte, and Andrew Arnot, having appeared as commissioners from the parish, they presented the call duly attested. The Presbytery sustained the call as “legally proceeded in ;” and the moderator having offered it to Mr. Erskine, he took it in his hand, but requested that the Presbytery might not consider him as expressing a positive compliance with the call, and then laid it on the table. The Presbytery discovered great eagerness to expedite the settlement, prescribed the usual exercises for trial to Mr. Erskine, and recommended it to him, meantime, to preach at Portmoak as frequently as he could. Having acquitted himself creditably in all his exercises, the Presbytery, at a meeting at Kirkaldy on September 3d, appointed his ordination to take place on the 22d of that month. It seems worth while here to present the reader with the following extract of the minute of Presbytery, recording this solemn transaction.

While it serves to show the then customary form of procedure, it contains a complete list of his original co-presbyters, and specifies a certain condition on which he accepted the charge of Portmoak.

“ *At Portmoak Manse, Sept. 22, 1703.*

“ *Hor. 10 ma.* After prayer, *sederunt* Mess. Andrew Wardroper Moderator, John Shaw, John Affleck, Thomas Russell, James Grierson, John Cleghorn, Joseph Drew, John Wilson. Absents, Mess. Robert and Andrew Elliots, and Patrick Melvill. This day the edict of Mr. Ebenezer Areskin, conform to the Presbytery's former appointment was returned, duly indorsed, by Mr. John Affleck, minister at Auchterderran, as an execution under his hand produced and read, bears. And the same being called three several times at the most patent door of the kirk of Portmoak this day, (the parishioners being convened at the time to hear sermon,) that if any person or persons had any thing to object against the life or doctrine of Mr. Ebenezer Areskin, why he may not be ordained and admitted minister of Portmoak, conform to the call given him by the heritors and elders of that parish, that they compear before this Presbytery met at the manse of Portmoak presently. None compeared to object, which the Presbytery considering, do resolve to proceed to the ordination and admission of the said Mr. Areskin, minister at Portmoak, immediately after sermon.

“ Mr. Ebenezer Areskin represented to the Presbytery that he foresaw great difficulties in managing the work of the ministry in the parish of Portmoak, and therefore earnestly entreated, that if he found himself unable to bear up under them, they would grant unto

him an act of transportability ; otherwise, he durst not, notwithstanding of the progress made towards his settlement, adventure upon it. Which representation being considered by the Presbytery, they did unanimously enact, that, if Mr. Areskin should meet with insuperable grievances, which after due pains taken by them, cannot be redressed, they would allow him an act of transportability. Mr. Ebenezer Areskin did subscribe the Confession of Faith, as the confession of his faith, in the face of the Presbytery."

" *Eodem die, Hora 3tia pom.* After prayer, *sederunt*, After public prayer and preaching by Mr. Andrew Wardroper, minister of Ballingry, and Moderator of the Presbytery, who preached on that text, i. Cor. iii. 9, 10, ' For we are labourers together with God ; ye are God's husbandry ; ye are God's building.' The said Mr. Areskin was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, and admitted minister of Portmoak, according to the word of God and the established order of this kirk, none excepting against the same. Whereupon the Moderator and remanent members of the Presbytery gave him the right hand of fellowship, and did receive him as their co-presbyter ; and the heritors and elders, and masters of families took him by the hand, in token of their oneness with him, and submitting to him as their lawful pastor."

Such were the circumstances attending Mr. Erskine's entrance on the first scene of his pastoral labours, which, notwithstanding its comparative obscurity and contracted limits, proved neither uninteresting nor unproductive.

The parish of Portmoak, though connected with the

Presbytery of Kirkaldy, Fifeshire, belongs to the county of Kinross. It is seven miles long, and about five miles broad. Its principal villages are Portmoak, Kinness-wood, Scotland-well, and Easter Balgedie. In the year 1755, the number of souls, according to Dr. Webster's return, was 996; and in all probability, the population was nearly the same at the commencement of the eighteenth century. The villages are romantically situated, having the lofty mountains of Lomond on the one side; and, on the other, the spacious and beautiful lake of Loch Leven, interspersed with a number of isles, including that in which Mary, Queen of Scots, was confined about eleven months in the years 1567-8. Various circumstances connected with this parish have engaged the attention of antiquarians; as its name Portmoak, derived from St. Moak, in honour of whom a Priory was erected on the banks of the lake; the isle of St. Serf or Servanus, containing an ancient Priory, dedicated to that saint; the Monastery of Portmoak, which stood on the east bank of the loch, was founded by Rogasch, king of the Picts, and belonged to the Culdees; and the Hospital of Scotland-well, situated at the bottom of south Lomond, or Bishop's-hill, founded by Malvoisine, a Bishop of St. Andrews, and given to the Red Friars in 1250. The ruins of the castle where Queen Mary was imprisoned, are beautifully described by the celebrated Michael Bruce, a native of Kinness-wood, in his poem on Loch Leven. Amongst the men of learning to whom this parish has given birth in ancient times, particular notice is generally taken of Andrew Winton, Prior of Loch Leven, in the reign of James I., who wrote in Scottish metre what is called the *Loch Leven*

Chronicle ; or a History of the world from its creation to the captivity of James I. ; and John Douglas, of the family of Pittendrieck, who became Rector of the University of St. Andrews, was appointed Archbishop in 1571, and was the first Protestant who possessed that see.*

For many years after the Reformation, part of the Priory of Portmoak was occupied as the place of worship. But in the year 1659, a new church was erected at the distance of a mile from the village, where it still remains. It appears to be about seventy feet long, and only twenty wide. Notwithstanding some improvements it has undergone, its present appearance (1830) is probably very little different from what it was a hundred years since. The old and deep pulpit of oak, carved according to the Dutch fashion ; the rusty iron case for holding the baptismal basin ; and a sun-dial, near the south-west door, leading to the pulpit—have all an aspect exceedingly antique. A few ancient seats along the back-wall, contribute, with other circumstances, to confirm the tradition, that this church was entirely composed of materials transported from the old priory. The stone, opposite to the pulpit, however, on which Mr. Erskine is said, for some years at first, to have constantly fixed his eye when delivering his discourses, seems to have been removed.†

* Most of the above particulars respecting this parish are taken from an ample account of it by Dr. Andrew Grant, formerly minister of Portmoak. *Statist. Acc. of Scotland*, vol. v. No. 9, pp. 156-174.

† It is now proposed, we understand, to build a new church at Portmoak.

His manse was demolished and replaced by another about the year 1741.

What the difficulties were that he anticipated, and which induced him to solicit the promise of “an act of *transportability*,” we do not exactly know. From subsequent minutes of Presbytery it appears, that both his church and dwelling-house stood in great need of repairs, and that some of the heritors were, for a time, rather unwilling to incur the necessary expense. Possibly, however, he was chiefly apprehensive of opposition and trouble from a few individuals, who were either hostile to the Presbyterian interest, or incorrect in their morals. But whatever may have been the nature and extent of the grievances originally dreaded, we shall afterwards find that, by the blessing of God, his ministry was uncommonly successful, and that he and his parishioners were united by the most endearing bonds.

Within somewhat less than six months after Mr. Erskine's settlement at Portmoak, another event occurred, which had a most salutary influence on his subsequent history—his marriage with ALISON TURPIE, daughter to Mr. Alexander Turpie, writer in Leven, Fifeshire, and Mrs. Jean Friar, daughter of Mr. William Friar, merchant in Edinburgh. The contract, which is still extant, was entered into, in the presence of his brother Ralph and a Mr. Robertson of Leslie. The marriage was celebrated at Edinburgh, in the house of Mr. Balderston, on the 2d February 1704. The singular worth of Alison Turpie, and the felicitous consequences of this union, will appear in the sequel.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Erskine's religion defective at the commencement of his ministry—Happy change in his views and feelings—Time and means of this change—Extended view of his character and experience, supplied by his Diary—Deep solicitude respecting eternity—Humility and penitence—Sentiments regarding the Saviour's person and work—Confiding faith in Christ—Admiration and love—Self-dedication—Conscientious fidelity in principle and practice—Spirituality of mind.

WHILST a competent share of literature and science is justly regarded as an important qualification for the sacred office, personal religion is at least equally essential; and the public usefulness of a minister, when other circumstances are alike, will usually be proportioned to his own attainments in fervent and enlightened piety. It seems proper, therefore, before describing the manner in which Mr. Erskine discharged his ministry at Portmoak, to give some account of his religious character and experience. For this part of our design, we are furnished with ample and very interesting materials, by his own Diary.

He had always been considered, it appears, as an excellent young man. A dutiful son, a diligent and a successful scholar, a faithful tutor, a blameless professor of Christianity, and now an acceptable preacher and an esteemed pastor,—he was thought to have exemplified, to a great extent, whatever is laudable and good. Yet, if we admit the correctness of his own re-

presentation of himself, his character was radically defective; and it was not till about three years after his ordination, that he understood the pure Gospel of Christ, or was at all savingly acquainted with its influence. He must be numbered, in short, amongst those clergymen, who, though once they preached a Saviour whom they did not know, have at last, through distinguishing mercy, experienced the power of illuminating and converting grace. This fact in his history will probably be new, to some who give these pages a perusal. The writer himself was never completely aware of it, till he had the satisfaction of reading his Diary. After mature consideration, he feels it to be right to unfold, in Mr. Erskine's own words, the nature of that important revolution which took place in his views and feelings.

The Diary, it is true, was obviously written, solely for himself, as a record of his exercises, and of the divine procedure towards him; the perusal of which, might afterwards be useful, for his admonition and encouragement in the Christian life. Nor had his relatives or friends entertained the least intention of giving any part of it to the world; as is clear from the fact, that, for about the space of seventy years, they have permitted it to sleep amongst his unpublished and short-hand manuscripts; and have latterly, if not from the first, neglected it, as a sealed book. The publication of some extracts from it, however, can reflect no discredit on his memory. These precious remains, on the contrary, now happily rescued from the gulf of oblivion, will serve to place his sterling character, as a Christian, in the most amiable and attractive light; while they seem calculated, by the divine blessing, to promote, most es-

entially, at once the credit and the spirit of vital religion. *The ingenuous statements of the Diary will, at any rate, disclose the secret but powerful cause of that holy and fervid eloquence which he displayed in the pulpit, and the hidden springs of that uncommon zeal and activity with which he publicly defended the interests of truth and righteousness against those by whom they were opposed.* Fidelity, and justice to the venerable author, render it necessary, in general, to produce the extracts *exactly* as they occur in the original.* No candid reader will indulge that fastidiousness of temper, which would make him too readily nauseate a trivial slip in grammar, a homely expression, or a provincial term.

The great change of sentiment and feeling to which we have alluded, happened in the year 1707 or 1708. The principal means of producing it, was the pious conversation of Mrs. Erskine, in connexion with a happy

* The reader is entitled to know precisely, to what extent any liberties have been taken with the manuscript, in the course of this publication.—Texts of Scripture are here quoted correctly in some passages, where, from inadvertency, slight inaccuracies in quotation occur in the original. In several sentences, for the sake of perspicuity, a few words are transposed, without the least further variation. A few redundant terms and phrases are occasionally omitted; the chief instance of which, is in the expressive interjection *O!* or *Oh!* which occurs much more frequently at the beginning of sentences in the original, than in the copy. For the sake of English readers, I have sometimes ventured to substitute an English word in place of a Scotch; as *know* for *ken*, *attempt* for *mint*, *flood* for *spate*. In a very few instances, in fine, two or three words are supplied by conjecture, where the manuscript was quite illegible. With these exceptions, there is no attempt at improving the diction. Far less have we dared to alter or modify the sense.

deliverance she obtained from a state of mental distress, into which she had fallen. The same wise and gracious Redeemer, who, at the commencement of the Christian economy, employed Aquila and Priscilla to "expound the way of God more perfectly" to the eloquent Apollos, made use of the humble and friendly efforts of Alison Turpie, for leading her gifted husband to a clearer and more impressive discernment of evangelical truth. This circumstance has been long, in some degree, known to those who take an interest in his history. A confidential conversation, it has been stated, which he accidentally overheard, betwixt his brother Ralph and her, on the subject of their religious experience, is believed to have signally contributed towards the salutary change that took place in his views of the Gospel. While they were imparting their sentiments to each other, without reserve, in a bower in his garden, immediately beneath the window of his study, which then happened to be open, he eagerly listened to their interesting communications. Their ideas and feelings appeared so different from his own, that he instantly felt himself obliged to conclude, that they possessed a valuable *something*, to which he was a stranger; and the impression seems to have remained till, with respect to vital Christianity, he became, not merely almost, but altogether such as they were.*

In full accordance with this statement, the Diary contains explicit and repeated acknowledgments of his obligations to Mrs. Erskine, as the honoured instrument, by which it pleased God to bring him to a real

* See the Memoir of Mr. Eben. Erskine, in Gospel-Truth, by the Rev. John Brown, Whitburn.

acquaintance with the power and comfort of religion. This is particularly narrated in his account of her character and experience, written after her death.* It is more briefly noticed in a letter which he wrote to his sister, Mrs. Balderston, immediately after his bereavement. Among the various considerations which he regarded as causes of gratitude in the midst of his sorrow, he specifies the great advantage he had received from her, with respect to his spiritual concerns. When exploring the divine direction, in fine, with regard to the course he should adopt in his widowhood, he solemnly renders thanks to God for what He had done for his soul, by the instrumentality of his first beloved partner.

“O Lord, my God in Christ, it has pleased thee, in thy holy and adorable providence, to bring me into a state of widowhood, by taking away the very desire of mine eyes. I bless thee with my soul, for the desirable loan that thou gavest me of my dear wife. When thou gavest her to me, thou gavest me a help-meet for me indeed; and that when I little minded to seek thy counsel about the choice. But the Lord chose well for me, and led me in the way I knew not, and made her a happy instrument, not only of building my family, and planting it with young olives, but also of much good and edification to my soul, *she being the particular mean and instrument of my being brought to an acquaintance with religion.*”

In various passages of the Diary, the 26th of August, 1708, is referred to, as a day on which he was favoured with a memorable manifestation of the glory of a reconciled God. Thus, in October that year, after lament-

* See this account, and the letter to Mrs. Balderston, Chap. vi.

ing the deadness and indifference of his spirit, and presenting his prayer for reviving grace, he adopts the language of grateful recollection :

“ My soul once a-day said unto the Lord, He is my Lord. I think I am sure of it, as sure of it as ever I was of any thing, that he brought my heart to give a consent to him, on the 26th of August last ; and I am as sure that he will never deny his own covenant. ‘ The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but his kindness shall not depart, neither shall the covenant of his peace be removed.’ O that my Lord and my God would fulfil his covenant in me, in subduing the strong corruption of my heart. O my God, wilt thou not do it for thy name’s sake. I beg it of thee, do it. Oh that I were beyond the reach of sin in the happy land, the inhabitant whereof doth not say, I am sick, because the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquity.”

The same divine manifestation is pleasantly alluded to in the two following entries :

“ Jan. 27, 1711.—I was made, with some delight and satisfaction of soul, to call to remembrance the expressions I had of the Lord’s love, Wednesday, Aug. 26, 1708, when my soul was made to leap within me, with the sweet views which I got of Christ, and of his covenant, and of nearness to God, and interest in him as my God.”

“ Feb. 7, 1715.—This morning I wakened out of sleep between 5 and 6, and as I wakened, I found myself with God. The Lord was drawing aside the vail, and giving my soul some awful but sweet discoveries of himself. I saw him to be great and good, and an every way up-making portion to the soul ; upon which

my soul said, O he is my God, I will prepare him an habitation, my father's God, and I will exalt him. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. He is the God and Father of my elder brother and my blessed husband, Jesus Christ; to whom he made me to give my consent upon Wednesday, August 26, 1708."

He does not expressly affirm, we may remark, that the 26th August 1708 was the day of his conversion. From the record of his experiences, which was begun November 22, 1707, it is manifest, that prior to that date, he was at least conscious of apprehensions and desires, sorrows and joys, which to him were altogether new. His mind was illuminated and impressed in a gradual manner; and possibly he did not venture to point out the very day on which he passed from a state of nature to a state of grace.

The confessions he frequently makes of the security, the practical atheism, and the sad indifference to the Gospel and the Saviour, which had formerly reigned in his heart, mingled with expressions of lively gratitude to God for his enlightening and regenerating grace, are most ingenuous and affecting. Let the following examples, quoted in the order in which they occur in the manuscript, suffice.

"*Portmoak, Sabbath, Nov. 28, 1708, between 5 and 6 at night.* I had been looking for a text against Wednesday next: but my thoughts, I knew not how, were diverted another way, to think of the Lord's goodness in sparing me to this day, and more especially of his goodness in recovering me out of that dangerous fever I had at Leslie, a little after my ordination. I remembered that, at that time, I was as stupid and uncon-

cerned about my soul and the great concerns of it, as though I had not had a soul within me. I remember, indeed, that my wife, my servant, and my sister-in-law, were weeping and mourning about me, because they thought I was gone. When I saw them weeping, I burst out in tears—that I behoved to leave my poor melancholy wife, and weeping friends, and that I was to bid an eternal adieu to the world, and to all the comforts and enjoyments thereof, and to go into endless eternity. But, alas ! alas ! I had not the least concern about my poor soul. I was like a very beast before God ; and I make not the least question but I had perished eternally, if God had, at that time, cut the thread of my life. I thought the Lord's goodness in recovering me did, at this time, affect my heart. I thought I had never rendered him due praise for my recovery : upon which I fell down upon my knees before the Lord, and blessed him, that he had recovered me, and did not take me away at that time—that he had reserved me for better things. Glory unto my God, that hath since that time, made me to know something of his goodness to my soul, and kindled, I think, a smoking flax in my heart, which sometimes burns with love to and desire after himself. On all this I was made to renew my covenant-engagement unto the Lord, and I did it in such terms as these : O Lord there is nothing that can do for me but thyself alone—a God or nothing. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost must be my God ; and blessed be thy name thou hast said that thou wilt be my God, and that I shall be thy servant ; and then my heart said within me, Content, Lord, I will be thine, if thou wilt make me so ; I take thy word upon it, for thy word is the best security I can have. I was made to

stand astonished at the condescension of the Lord in taking the like of me into covenant with himself. Upon this I asked of the Lord, that he would fulfil his covenant in me; that he would subdue my corruption, subdue atheism, subdue unbelief, subdue pride; that he would sanctify me by his spirit, justify me by the blood of my dearest Lord, and work all my works in me and for me. I thought I was sure the Lord would do these things for me, because he had promised; and I have them, because I have his promise for them. God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice."

"*P. Friday, Aug. 5, 1709.* This morning, between 8 and 9 o'clock, I read the 4th chapter of the Acts, and the Lord was pleased, in this passage of scripture, to discover something of Christ unto my soul. And when I had done reading, I fell down upon my knees to pray; and O it was sweet, sweet, because I found and saw the Lord in the duty. He gave me something of his presence, as an earnest of the inheritance. He did discover something of the fulness of Christ, and the wonders of redeeming love and mercy in him, so that I could not but say, Hallelujah, salvation, glory, honour, and power, to the Lord my God, that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. Glory to Him that remembered me in my low estate. When I was turning a *mere atheist*, when I was swallowed up in unbelief, rebellion and enmity against God, then it was that he did break in upon my heart. When I was sinking into the horrible pit, he lifted me up, and made a day of grace to dawn upon my soul. O glory, glory, glory, glory unto the Lord my God for the riches and freedom of his love and mercy. Glory to the Lord that I see my life is now hid with Christ in

God ; because Christ lives, I shall live also. How sweet is his name to my soul : It is sweeter than ointment poured forth. When shall I be with him, so as never to part with him again."

"*P. Sept. 7th, near 10 at night, 1713.* This day I have had some pleasant views of God. I was just now contemplating his glory shining in the stars of the firmament. I think there is much of his glory to be seen there. I cannot think of his greatness, as I should do. It swallows up all thoughts and expressions. But surely it will be a strange and wonderful thing, to be in the immediate enjoyment of this great and glorious God, who made the heaven and the earth, and the stars. O Lord, thou art exceeding great. I think it is a wonder that this God has taken on him the nature of man. It is wonderful and amazing love that made him stoop and condescend so low. And I think he must be a worthy and wonderful Mediator, a worthy advocate indeed. He cannot but prevail for the souls for whom he pleads, since all power in heaven and in earth is in his hand. He is the Lord of life and glory. I think I am content to entrust him with my cause, and with all the eternal interests of my precious soul, though it were worth all the souls that ever had a being since the fall of Adam. Oh ! he is precious, precious ! I love him, I adore him, and desire it as my chief good to be like him, and to be with him, that I may behold his glory. I hope that when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, then I shall appear with him in glory. Lord, give me faith to believe that Jesus, the Son of Mary, is the Son of God, and the Saviour of sinners ; and make my heart to triumph and rejoice in him. O he is a wonderful Saviour ; and how wonderful is his grace that ever

made me to admire him. I remember that once it was nauseous to me to hear of Christ. I looked upon the doctrine of Christ as stuff, and I wearied of nothing so much as to read the history of Christ in the Evangelists. I thought it the most wearisome part of the Bible, to read the four Evangelists; since they come over the same things. But now I love to read of Christ; I love to hear of him; and I think no part of the Bible so sweet as that part of it which once I most depreciated. It was there that I saw his glory first, and there I see it still. Glory to him that ever opened mine eyes; for once I was as blind as a mole, I saw nothing of the glory of the Redeemer. But now I think him the greatest wonder that ever the world saw; I can never see enough of him; and when he is out of my sight, I think myself shut up in darkness. I desire to run my race, looking unto Jesus. A sight of him is that which refreshes my soul, and puts life, light, and gladness into my heart, and a 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.' O I cannot think of parting with him. He is the life of my life, and the soul of my soul; and my all is in him. He is like a bundle of myrrh to me; and O I would lay him 'betwixt my breasts'—give him the best room in my heart. 'His name is as ointment poured forth;' which makes my very soul to love him, and close with him."

"*P. Thursday, Oct. 8, 1713.* I find much of the Lord now and then discovered to my soul. Particularly, coming home this night, I saw the whole earth full of the wonders of the Lord; and if the earth be so full of his glory, O what must there be in heaven! My soul was made to go out to him, almost all the way coming home [from Dunfermline;] and I got sweet

enlargement in private duty this night, after I came home. That which makes me remark all this is, that there is a promise made to the diligent observers of God's ways and methods, that they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. Ps. cvii. 43. Glory be to his name, that has made me to know and believe that he is—so that I no more doubt of his being, than I doubt of my own ; and, through his grace, I am resolved never to doubt it, or to call it into question any more ; though my vile, wicked, and atheistical heart has many times done it formerly. And I think, blessed be his name, that he has convinced me that the blessed Bible is his word, because none can speak so but He. And O I love and adore it, because it is his word. I value it more than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; and I rejoice in it, as one that has found great treasure. I would not give the Bible for ten thousand worlds, because it is the word of God. O but it be a wonderful thing, to have the word of the eternal God ; God speaking to men, and declaring his will to us for our salvation. He has not dealt so with every nation. My soul gives glory to God for this blessed book, and that ever I heard the joyful sound. Blessed be his name that has honoured me to be a minister of his Gospel, and to preach and proclaim the glad-tidings of salvation through Christ, his eternal Son, to miserable sinners. It is a great honour, an unspeakable dignity. O that I may be honoured to do good to many a soul."

The extracts already introduced are sufficient to establish the fact, that, in his own apprehension, Ebenezer Erskine was, till more than two years after the commencement of his ministry, a stranger to the power and com-

fort of the gospel, and that at the time which has been specified, he became acquainted with "the true grace of God." It would be exceedingly wrong, however, after having admitted our readers to the secret chambers of this man of God, to oblige them to withdraw, without first affording them an opportunity of leisurely fixing their eyes on him, and beholding those sacred transactions in which he unreservedly poured out his heart into the bosom of his heavenly Father. Instead of hastily dismissing, as unwelcome intruders, the many Christians who venerate his memory, and have been edified by his writings, it seems reasonable to indulge them with a deliberate view of those retired exercises, which at the same time amply develop the real character of the good man contemplated, and administer instruction, warning, and encouragement to the devout spectator. Not a few of the expressions to be quoted, may be justly expected to breathe all the ardour natural to a new convert, or a zealous proficient; nor will it excite surprise, that on some occasions he may appear to attach a somewhat undue importance to that diversity of inward frames and feelings, of which he was conscious. Growing acquaintance with the divine life served to give him more accurate conceptions of various points connected with experimental religion; and nothing did he ultimately inculcate with greater zeal than an immediate and constant dependence on the blessed Mediator, as exhibited in the testimony and promise of the gospel.*

To render the following quotations the more memo-

* See, for instance, his last advice to weak believers, at the close of his sermons on the Assurance of Faith.

rable and useful, we shall give them an arrangement suited to the several features of his character, which they seem respectively calculated, more particularly, to illustrate.

His *deep solicitude respecting his own eternal welfare* is often expressed in striking terms. Let a single specimen suffice.—“ I find a deep and rooted concern in my soul about my state ; having death and eternity in my view with such liveliness, and with such an awe and dread, as fills me with the utmost perplexity, and makes me cry with the jailor, ‘ What shall I do to be saved ? ’ I see death and eternity unavoidable ; there is no escaping them. Something or other must be done, in order to my eternal well-being ; and in all the world I know not where to find rest for the sole of my foot, if I do not find it in Christ. And O I think there is so much excellency and worth, so much sweetness and safety in his person and purchase, that if I could but rely on him, I would have complete rest and satisfaction. The way of salvation through the ever blessed Redeemer is a pleasant device and contrivance. I find in my soul an earnest thirst and insatiable longing after him—to be found in him, having his complete righteousness. O to have my soul grounded on this sweet foundation.”

Nothing is of more frequent occurrence in this journal, than the language of *humility and penitence*. The abasing designations he takes to himself, and his bitter lamentations over the darkness and deadness of his own heart, and the temporary prevalence of in-dwelling sin, notwithstanding former resolutions, attainments and hopes, discover a lively sense of personal unworthiness and guilt. Often did he water his couch with

his tears, and lift up his supplications and cries out of great depths of perplexity and anguish. The truth is, that the man whose eyes have been opened to see the glory of God, the spirituality of the law, and the extent of his own inherent depravity, is apt, in the simplicity of his heart, to utter mournful and self-abasing confessions, which excite the surprise, if not the contempt of those around him. "I have known many instances," says a writer of eminent ability and intelligence,* "in which the most genuine expressions of self-abasement, happening to fall from aged experienced Christians, have appeared to others as little better than affectation. They were not able to conceive the propriety of those sentiments, which long acquaintance with God and with ourselves, doth naturally and infallibly inspire." The following extracts breathe, without doubt, the genuine spirit of deep humiliation and repentance.

"Iniquities have prevailed against me; and I have been, and still am, these two days, sadly in the dark. The Lord is hiding and frowning, and covering himself with a cloud in his anger; and I dare not say but he is just and righteous in so doing; for I have given him cause to hide himself for ever, and plead an everlasting controversy with me. O I have been a fool, and as a beast before the Lord. I know not what to do. I am afraid that the Lord cast me off; and I am sure, were it not that his covenant stands fast in Christ, I should have no ground of hope. The Lord pity me, and pardon me, and restore unto me the joy of

* Dr. Witherspoon's Practical Treatise on Regeneration, ch. ii. sect. 4.

his salvation. I see I shall turn an apostate, and become a scandal and a reproach to religion, if the Lord forsake me. The least temptation carries me off my feet, when left to myself. O to be kept by the power of God. Through grace I will not return again to folly, if the Lord would return to me. O bitter, bitter sin, that separates between me and my God."

"This day," he says at another time, "I am dead and hard, and stupid, like a very stone. I see that I feel nothing; but only I see that I am a sinner; and scarcely do I see that. I am afraid that all is wrong with me, and the work as yet to begin; for I am carnal, sold under sin. I am slothful and careless; I cannot pray, I cannot work for my master. I am negligent in duty; I have not one good thought in my heart. Lord pity me. I am afraid to live in this case, and yet I am afraid to die. I am untender in my walk; I am unholy; I am guilty of sins against knowledge, and sins of ignorance. Lord take away the stony heart out of my flesh, and give me a heart of flesh." At subsequent periods he thus renews his complaint: "I have been as it were buried under mountains of corruption and guilt, sinking in the horrible pit, and the miry clay." "I do not think ever there was a poor soul, that had the least spark of saving grace, in such a bad condition as I have been, for this long time past. A subtle devil, a deceitful heart, and an ensnaring world, have made a prey of me, and driven me before them, as a downright slave and captive."

This eminent Christian, in short, was prepared, like Paul, to consider himself as the chief of sinners, and the greatest debtor to sovereign grace. Accordingly, after

bemoaning a season of desertion, and departure from the living God, he adds, "O that it were with me as in months past. If he do return and receive me graciously, I am sure there will not be a greater monument of free grace, either in heaven or earth, than I am. I think there is not one in heaven that will, or can, sing such high hallelujahs to the Lamb as I shall do, when I come to heaven, through him who is the way, the truth, and the life."

Amid all this self-abasement and contrition, he was blessed with *spiritual apprehensions and reviving discoveries of the Saviour*. His evangelical views of Christ's person and work, are manifest from a variety of entries. With regard to his *divinity*: "This morning," he says, July 2, 1714, "I awakened between 4 and 5, with that sweet word, John xvii. 4. 'Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was;' in which word, I got a view of the divine nature of the Lord Jesus, which made my soul to acquiesce in him as a complete Saviour and Redeemer."—With regard to his *coming in the flesh*: "Looking forth again this night at my window, Dec. 17, 1714, and seeing the glory of God in the heavens and the stars, I admired the greatness and glory of the eternal Lord, and I wondered at his condescension in assuming the human nature. The greatness of that condescension is such, that it shocks reason, and confounds the soul with admiration, and is almost ready to stagger faith, and cause the believer to say, 'Can such a thing be?' But, O it is true, it is true: His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above ours, and his thoughts above ours. I rejoiced

to think of the truth of it, that the great God is become man, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, my friend, my elder brother, my husband."—With respect to his *vicarious obedience, sufferings, and death*. "July 18, 1716. About 5 at night, I went to God in prayer alone, and was helped to exercise faith on the blood and merits of Christ. I saw evidently, the dignity and excellence of his person, which gave value and worth to the whole of his undertaking in the room of lost sinners. I saw the whole preceptive part of the law fulfilled by his perfect obedience; and the penalty of it endured by him in his death upon the cross. And thereupon my soul cried out, O Lord, I see myself a debtor to the whole law, and in myself I am undone for ever, if thou proceed against me according to the tenor of the covenant of works: but, O Lord, I flee unto the righteousness of God. Here is my Surety's active obedience, whereby the whole covenant of works is fulfilled, yea, magnified and made honourable. Here is his passive obedience, by which the justice of God is for ever satisfied in my room, so that now I cannot come into condemnation, my Surety having been condemned for me. The view of this made a Sabbath of rest in my soul, which, I hope, shall never have an end. My soul *freely* disclaimed all pretensions to any righteousness in itself, and acquiesced entirely in the righteousness of God, crying, This is my rest, here will I dwell, for I have desired it. As for my sins, I see them all swallowed up in the ocean of Christ's merit. And as for my own personal obedience to the law, I see that there is nothing left to me, but to serve the Lord, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of my life; in regard that weakness on my part cannot make void the

covenant of grace, which is sealed with the blood of Christ. I was made to pray for the Spirit of Christ to be poured out upon me; and believed that, in some measure, I have the Spirit, and shall have it yet in a more liberal measure, to kill all my sins and corruptions, and to make me meet to be a partaker of the inheritance. I find that nothing but such a view of Christ as this can give ease or quiet to a poor soul under the charges of the law, and the accusations of conscience. But when I get this view of the Lord Jesus, I see I may boldly say, "Who can lay any thing to my charge? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died ——. My soul was made to rest in the way of salvation through Christ, because I saw it to be a way to glory, which for ever empties and debases man, and which contributes for ever to exalt and magnify the glory of free, free grace. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Mr. Erskine, it is evident, clearly discerned the *sanc-tifying* as well as the *consoling power of the cross*. Of this, the following lively passage affords still further proof. Having adverted to a discovery of the grace of God in Christ, by which his fears were dispelled, he thus continues: "And, O my soul wondered at the height, the depth, the breadth, and the length, of his love in him. I saw his righteousness to be a broad everlasting righteousness, sufficient to justify ten thousand millions of worlds, being the righteousness of God. On this blessed bottom I rest and roll my soul for ever and ever. On this blessed foundation, do I build all my hope. O shall ever such a mass of iniquity as I am, be admitted to behold the glory of the Lamb, and sing hallelujahs unto him, with the rest of the redeemed

company. If I were sure to be with him where he is, and to be eternally rid of sin, I would be glad, *glad* that my soul this moment should break prison, and fly out of the clay tabernacle in which it is coopt up. Words cannot tell the longing that I find in my soul after the immediate enjoyment of the blessed Jesus. I hope that time shall come, because he gives, I think, some of the earnest of it, and because he will satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry with good things. Christ is the cope-stone of my happiness.—The only thing that mars my comfort, and mixes my wine with water, and gives a dash to my hopes, is the prevalence of sin. I am led captive by it. I am afraid that I do not walk after the Spirit, but after the flesh. But this I can say, that I would *fain* be rid of the body of sin. If my worthless heart do not deceive me, I desire to receive Christ for sanctification, as well as for justification. O to have his law written on my heart, as with a pen of iron, as with the point of a diamond.” “It pleased the Lord,” says he again, “to bruise him as our Surety. O how bitter should this make sin to me, that it is so hateful to my covenanted God, and to my blessed Redeemer, who suffered so much for it.” “I thought with myself; who would not love such a blessed one, and who would not obey him, who shed the warm blood of his heart, for love to lost sinners? O that my soul may be changed into his image. O that I may have it for my heaven through eternity, to behold, admire, and praise him. What a sweet sight will it be, to see him who was dead, and is alive, and lives for evermore!”

His attention was directed to his Redeemer, not only as crucified, but as risen and exalted. The luminous and cheering views he entertained of his *resurrection*,

ascension, intercession, and glorious appearing, are expressed in the following entries :

“*P. Dec. 3, 1708.* My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth, that I have a great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Glory to the Lord, I may now ask any thing that I need, and may ask it with boldness, and may now believe that I shall have whatsoever I need ; justification, sanctification, adoption, victory over corruption, atheism, hardness, and all the plagues of my heart. Since Christ is risen, I will set my affections on things that are above, where Christ is at the right hand of God.”

“*Oct. 25, 1711.* I went last night to Strahmiglio, where I tarried all night, in Mr. George Gillespie’s. I came home again this night. I went to my closet, and read in my ordinary, Luke xxiv. concerning the resurrection of Christ, and his appearing to his disciples. After reading, it was somewhat sweet to my soul.—What a mercy is it that Christ did not immediately ascend into glory after his resurrection, without showing himself, and giving such evidences of his resurrection to his people. Hence I make this remark, that Christ is better than his word ; for I do not remember in all the Old Testament, any promise by which he obliged himself to continue so long upon the earth after his resurrection. It is only said, Ps. cx. 7, that ‘he shall drink of the brook in the way, and then shall he lift up the head ;’ and in Isaiah liii. ‘I will divide him a portion with the great,’ &c. But no obligation upon him from any of the prophecies, so far as I can understand, to continue on earth after his resurrection, and converse with his disciples, and give them evidence of

the reality of his resurrection. The prophecies would have been fulfilled, though he had never appeared to any man, and we would have been bound to believe his resurrection, as is plain from verse 26th. O how condescending is he ! and what a blessed security hath he given for faith to rest upon ! He has left no room for our doubting or unbelief.—After I had done with reading this portion of Scripture, I went to prayer ; and in it I found my soul dissolved, as it were, into a flood of tears of joy, to think that he who was dead is alive, and lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death.”—“ O happy I, that have Christ in heaven before me, as my Fore-runner, appearing in the presence of God for me, keeping my room in heaven till I shall follow him, which, I hope, shall not be long.”

“ *Jan. 25, 1714.* It is my earnest prayer, and has been this considerable time, that the Lord would encrease my faith, that he would blow upon the smoking flax and withered spices, and make them to revive. I see I might rejoice evermore, if I could believe.—It sometimes refreshes my soul, to think of the glorious appearing of Christ the Lord, in the clouds of heaven, with his glorious train of saints and angels. O that I may make a part of his retinue ! I hope it shall be so ; for I think he has won my heart, so that I cannot but say, Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none in all the earth whom I desire besides thee. My soul chooses the Lord for its *only* portion and heritage in time, and through eternity.”

His *faith in Christ, and devout affections towards Him*, corresponded with the views he entertained of the

Saviour's character and mediation. His faith was decidedly *self-renouncing*; as appears from the following passage:

“God was pleased in prayer to give me a sweet view of the way of justification by Christ. I saw that it is in the Lord Jesus Christ only, that we have righteousness and strength. My soul did renounce the law as a covenant of works, and betook itself unto the better Husband, even to him that is raised from the dead, him that hath fulfilled all righteousness, and paid the ransom as my Surety. I see that the Gospel way of salvation is the sweetest way that ever a poor soul travelled in. I see that the law has nothing to demand of the soul in point of justification, for that is done; and it has no obedience to require on this score. As creatures, and as Christians, it is true, we are bound to obey the laws and commandments of our Creator and Redeemer. But the believer may now obey without fear. Legal bondage, through fear of death, is gone, because it is a state of liberty and freedom from the curse of the law which believers are brought unto, and freedom from it also as a *rigorous* exacter of obedience. It is not fear but love that now obliges the soul to obedience; and seeing it is the obedience of love, the believer cannot but obey with joy, and cheerfulness, and liberty of soul, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God.”

While he thus renounced every legal principle and hope, he earnestly sought, and in a high degree attained, a *strong, assured, confiding, and appropriating* faith. His ardent desire of assurance is thus expressed:

“I see myself standing on the brink of an endless state. I see the uncertainty of my time; I know not when the Lord shall call. My soul is panting and

thirsting after the Lord. I long to be filled with God, and to be in a readiness to depart. I see that I have a great God to do with after death, by whose sentence I must stand or fall through eternity. I long to be assured of his love, and to have the full assurance of faith; and I cannot rest till I attain to a well-grounded hope of glory. Woe's me, I have lost views of Christ, and can see nothing but a great God; and when I remember him, I am troubled at the thoughts of his greatness and awful majesty. But O, I am sure, they are happy souls that have his favour; and his favour is ten thousand times better than life."

Notwithstanding the occasional uncertainty of which he thus complains, his faith was, in general, lively and strong. The following sentences, indicating a faith of this description, are selected from a number of entries.

"Though I had all the souls of all the posterity of Adam dwelling in me, I could venture them all on the infinite virtue and value of the death and obedience of the blessed Jesus. My soul, with the greatest boldness and freedom, rolls itself upon him and his everlasting righteousness. He who is God's elect and chosen one, is also my elect, and the choice of my soul. I delight, I rejoice, I triumph in him." "My soul was made to believe that God will take away the stony heart, and give a heart of flesh; that he will give his Spirit to cause me to walk in his statutes; that the Spirit shall testify of Christ, convincing of sin, righteousness, and judgment: and discovering the deep things of God unto me—because he has promised all these things. God hath spoken in his holiness, and, therefore, I will rejoice. He cannot deny himself." "I found something of Christ, in reading Luke x. particularly verses 23, 24.

‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see,’ &c. Though I have not seen him with my bodily eyes, as the disciples did, yet I am blessed also, because he has helped me to see him by the eye of faith; and he has pronounced a blessing on such also, John xx. 29. ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’ The sights that I have had of him, have filled me with a joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory. And even at this present time, the very thought of him refreshes and lifts up my soul; particularly that word, ‘This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ It is worthy, worthy, of acceptance. Indeed, my soul embraces him, and accepts of him, with ten thousand good wills. I accept of him for all the ends and uses for which he is designed of the Father; and my very soul leaps for joy, as the babe in Elizabeth’s womb, when I read or hear of his ever-blessed name. It is good news, that he is the Lord my righteousness, and that through him the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in me, so that I am ready to die, and to stand as righteous before the tribunal of God, there being no condemnation to them that are in him. He has obeyed the law, he has borne the curse, he has paid the ransom. He has died and risen again, and ascended, and is my Advocate with the Father. Who then can harm me? What can the law, or justice, or the world, or the devil, or conscience, lay to my charge? O what ground of triumph is here! Thanks be to God, who always causes me to triumph in Christ. This is my beloved, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

The expressions of assurance are often blended with

the most explicit *appropriation*. Let two examples suffice.

“*P. July 24, 1722.* This night, in secret prayer, and in family prayer, the Lord loosed my bonds, and enlarged my heart; and the way he did it was by helping me to appropriate and apply Christ to my soul, upon the ground of the free offer and gift that he has made of him to me, in particular, in the Gospel. Oh the little word *my* is a sweet word to my soul. I was made to say, my Saviour, my Redeemer, my King, my Priest, and my Prophet. He is mine, because God has given him to me; and I cannot please God better than by taking him to myself; and, accordingly, I take him with heart and hand, and I bless the Lord that ever gave him. O Lord, keep me at ‘*My Lord, and my God,*’ and let me never quit it, through unbelief. And let me never quit contending for the appropriating act of faith. I bless the Lord that has honoured me, in any measure, to contend for it; and to contribute to set it in any light, either among ministers or Christians. O that I had a throne for my Redeemer, higher than the highest heavens. God has highly exalted him, and I desire to exalt him too.”

“*July 22, 1723.*—I was made to clasp about, and to close with this promise, [viz. ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’] A God is that which I want; and here I have him. Here I have thy faithfulness pledged, that thou wilt be my God. Here thou givest thyself unto me; and glory to thee, thy gifts are without repentance. Thou dost not take a thing, and give a thing, as men do. No: when thou givest, thou givest for ever; and, therefore, thou art my God for

ever, and my guide even unto death. Here thou givest thyself, ‘I will be their God.’ What more can the most enlarged heart desire, than a God in Christ? Here is all at once. Here is pardon, for he is a pardoning God. Here is peace; for he is in Christ the God of peace, a pacified and reconciled God. Here is light; for God is light, and with him is no darkness at all. Here is love; for God is love. What tongue can tell, what heart can conceive, all that lies within the womb of this word, ‘I will be their God.’ O Lord, this is all my salvation; and the faith and hope of this will bear me through life and death, and make me to go singing into eternity.”

It is an essential character of a true faith, that it *worketh by love*; and if we may judge from the candid and repeated statements of this humble believer, respecting the movements of his own heart, we cannot doubt that his affections towards the Saviour were exceedingly ardent. Admiration, gratitude, desire, delight, and devotedness, are often strikingly expressed. In addition to the instances comprized in some of the preceding quotations; the following seem worthy of notice:

“O that I could bless God for Christ; and that I could bless him for giving Christ unto me, in particular; and for giving his Spirit to testify of him to me. Hallelujah! Blessing, glory, and honour, unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. Hallelujah in the highest!

“O set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for my love to thee is strong as death. Oh! my desire after him was ardent—to be found in

him, to be hid in the clefts of this blessed rock of ages. My heart got a sweet loosing; and the frame of my heart dropt out at my eyes with tears. O that the Lord may be with me while in the world, and keep me from the evil of it, and make me faithful unto death."

"A sight of Christ, as God-man, just swallows up my spirit—draws out my heart, so that I have not a heart behind. He carries away the flower of the affections, when he presents himself to the soul. He darkens heaven and earth and all that is therein. The angels, the sun, the moon, and all, is black, in comparison of him. But O I see darkly, as through a glass. When his face, shown through the lattice, casts such a lustre that it creates a very heaven in the soul. O it is the heaven of heaven to be where he is. Rivers of pleasure, fulness of joy, are in his presence. O he makes me to give my heart, my soul, my body, my wife, my children, my servant, my friends, my estate, to him; and I can refuse him nothing. When he shows himself, he makes me to lay all down at his blessed feet; and O I love to give Christ all."

"O he is wonderful, and I admire his love, and adore him, and shall adore him through an endless eternity. I find a coal of red love in my heart towards this lovely One. This fire can never be quenched; for he hath said that 'he will not quench the smoking flax,' but will cherish and encourage it, till it become a flaming and a burning lamp, to burn in heaven for ever and ever. Thanks be to God, who has kept his love alive in my heart, when I thought it was quite drowned with the floods of sin, corruption, and temptation."—"O for grace to manifest to the

world, and to my own soul, the reality of my love, by a holy, tender, humble, and circumspect walk before him, in the land of the living."

A sense of his own unworthiness uniformly went to enhance his admiration of the love of God; and often did his soul overflow with *amazement at the freeness and sovereignty of divine grace*. These feelings are poured forth in the following entries:

"I am so vile and filthy, I know not what name to give to myself; and yet grace pays a visit to me. Glory to God in the highest. O that I had a trumpet to sound his praise, that could make heaven and earth to echo and resound."

"I have been bewildered and overpowered by sin. Mine iniquities had separated between me and my Christ; but, blessed be his name, I got a little glimpse of his face, which revived me this evening, particularly in that word which I read in my ordinary, Luke xiii. 11, where Christ cured the woman that had the spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed down so that she could not lift herself up. I saw Christ, I thought, in this miraculous cure; and my soul did clasp around him, and run out to him as the Lord my righteousness and my strength. I had sweet liberty in prayer after reading. I was helped, I thought, to plead that he who cured this woman, would also cure me of my soul-plagues. By laying his hand on her, he healed her; and his hand is not shortened that he cannot save; he has not lost any of his power, now in a state of exaltation. O shall ever the like of me be exalted to be with him, to behold his glory. I adore the transcendant glory of his free grace, that comes over

mountains of impediments in his way. When I cast up the clouds, he is pleased, in his free grace, to scatter them. O what songs of praise shall I sing to free grace, in heaven, through eternity."

" *Sabbath, August 28, 1715.*—This night I went to my knees, and in prayer I sought him whom my soul loveth, and I found him. I said many times, and I desire to say it for ever, 'Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain.' My soul saw such a worthiness in him, that the whole world, yea thousands of worlds of gold and precious stones, are not able to match. O I love him; I exalt him; I give him the throne in my heart. The everlasting gates open of their own accord, when he does but draw aside the vail, and manifest himself to the soul. A sight of him is enough to ravish the heart, and make every thought a captive to his obedience. I look on this manifestation as the more surprising, that through the whole of this day, in public and in private, my heart has been like a stone, so that I had no light, no life. But ere ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib. I have this night to observe, that it is free grace that must triumph, and be exalted for ever. When I think I am farthest off from any discovery of Him, because of sin and guilt, then it is that he commonly comes. Glory, glory unto rich and free grace. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be the glory."

Among judicious writers on experimental religion, it is the prevailing sentiment that the gracious presence of God, and the consolations of his spirit, are usually enjoyed by the Christian, in a degree propor-

tioned to the fidelity he discovers in the exercise of grace, and the discharge of duty. This view of the subject is unquestionably confirmed by many passages of scripture,* as well as by the testimony of thousands of excellent Christians. It is reasonable at the same time, to believe Mr. Erskine's account in this and other entries of his Diary, and similar candid statements that have been given by other pious individuals, who positively affirm, that they have sometimes been visited with cheering manifestations of divine love, when they were particularly conscious of previous declension. The fact seems to be, that the freeness and sovereignty of the grace of God are displayed, not only in the first conversion of sinners, but frequently also in recovering them from subsequent backslidings, by the powerful manifestation of the saving truth to their conscience and heart, at a time when they are thoughtless and secure. Yet it must not be forgotten, that the renewed comfort of the declining Christian never fails to be attended with humbling convictions and confessions of his guilt, and with ardent desires, succeeded by corresponding endeavours, to glorify God by a more uniform and steady course of holy obedience. The Saviour manifested his sovereign and preventing grace to the Apostle Peter, when, after he had basely denied him, he gave him a most compassionate and penetrating look. Peter immediately went out and wept bitterly. The astonishing mercy of his Lord produced that godly sorrow which works a sincere and an abiding repentance.

* See for instance Isa. lix. 1, 2; Ch. lxiv. 5; Acts ix. 31; 1 John iii. 18-22.

Mr. Erskine entertained admiring thoughts of Jehovah, both as the God of *nature* and the God of *grace*. An exquisite sensibility to the beauties of creation, and even a disposition to contemplate the divine attributes manifested in them, may be found in persons who are totally blind and insensible to their own state and character as sinners, and to the moral perfections of God as displayed in the work of redemption. From the most ancient times, however, the pious have delighted to contemplate the Deity in the mighty works of his hand, and to unite, in their meditations, the wonders of external nature with the superior wonders of redeeming love. The beautiful examples of this devout propensity that occur in the book of Job, the Psalms, and Isaiah, are fitted to make a strong and a pleasing impression on every reader. President Edwards, at the commencement of his Christian course, as appears from his own account of his religious experience, was accustomed to survey with deep emotions of reverence, delight, and astonishment, the excellency of the boundless attributes of God shining forth in the sun, and moon, and stars, the clouds and azure sky, and his various other visible works.* That these works had a similar effect on the subject of this memoir, is evident, from several of the above extracts. In the following entries too, we find him, in like manner, rising in his contemplations, from the creation to the Creator of all, from the glories of nature to the more illustrious glories of grace—from the brightness of the starry sky to the inconceivable splendour of the heaven of heavens.

* Life of the Rev. Jonathan Edwards, pp. 26, 27. Ed. 1765.

“ *September 23, 1713, between 7 and 8 at night.*— I was this day at Kirkness and Ballingry, with my wife; and upon the way home, towards the twilight, a little after sun-set, the moon appeared in the east, about the full: and it pleased the Lord to give me some views of his power and glory in that creature. It appeared to me to be a vast body, bright and glorious, hanging pendular upon nothing, supported only by the power of the eternal God. I wondered how there could be an atheist in the world, that looked on this glorious creature, wherein there appeared so much of the wisdom and power of the Creator.”

“ *January 4, 1714, about 12 o'clock of the day, in my closet.* The morning of this day was dark and cloudy to my soul. I could see or feel nothing of the Lord. But as the day advanced towards its height, so the Lord began to dawn and break in upon my soul with discoveries of himself. I first got a view of his glory in the bright heavens, and in the clouds that are stretched forth above the earth; and my soul was made to wonder at his greatness and glory therein. I was led from the creature to the Creator. About 12 I went to secret prayer, and my soul was therein so delighted with the precious thoughts of God, that I longed to be in the immediate enjoyment of him, saying, ‘O Lord, whenever thou art pleased to call me off the stage of this wilderness, if thou wilt go with me through the valley of the shadow of death, I will go with songs, I will go singing eternal hallelujahs to thy name.’ My soul is delighted with the thought of being with Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and with the general assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven, and the spirits of just men made per-

fect. I am delighted to think, that, ere long, I shall pass through the visible heavens, and mount up above the sun, moon, and stars, with a guard of angels attending me, and come to the new Jerusalem that is above, and join issue with them that are singing the song, Rev. v. 12, ‘Worthy art thou to take the book, and open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God with thy blood, out of all nations, tongues, kindreds and peoples.’ I cannot deny but the Lord has given me some spiritual life, spiritual likeness and love to himself; and where he gives grace he will also give glory. The chains of salvation cannot be broken, Rom. viii. I am sometimes ravished with wonder at the freedom of God’s grace, that ever he should have pitched on the like of me, who was dead in trespasses and sins, to be a vessel of honour of any use and service. O how sweet is it for me to lose myself in those amazing depths of electing, redeeming, convincing and calling, justifying, sanctifying, and preserving grace. I am tongue-tacked, that I cannot praise him now; but I hope to get a loosing, when I come to glory.

“*December 14, 1714.*—Betwixt 6 and 7 at night, I opened my closet window, and it being a clear night, I delighted myself a while in contemplating the glory of the eternal God in the stars. I saw much of the power and wisdom of God therein, and of his admirable and adorable majesty. O what an infinite and incomprehensible Being is he, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. From them I was led on to think upon Christ,—that this great God should have come in the person of his eternal Son, and tabernacled in our nature in the form of a servant,—that he

should have humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. My soul was filled with amazement at his love and condescension. Many sweet texts came into my mind, and my very heart did chant them out, and sing them with pleasure, such as John iii. 16 ; 1 John iii. 1 ; John i. 14 ; Is. ix. 6 ; Luke ii. 9. My soul wondered at the excellency of the Redeemer, and my heart did burn with love to him, and longing after him. I said, with David, Ps. xlii. ‘ As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God : when shall I come and appear before God ? ’ ”

What is called *personal covenanting*, or solemn self-dedication to God, is an exercise in which this pious minister frequently engaged. The following covenant, written and subscribed with his own hand, was found among his papers : *

“ O my God, because I have so often broken my covenant of duty with thee, (though blessed be thy name, thy covenant of grace with my Surety can never be broken,) I do this day ratify and renew it, and earnestly desire grace from thee, O Lord, to keep it in another manner than I have done. I being of myself weak and insufficient for any thing, do again and again earnestly desire and crave thou wilt deal with me according to thy own sweet promise, on which I lay my soul’s salvation, and remember the word, O faithful God, recorded in Ezek. xxxvi. 26, ‘ A new heart also will I give thee ; and a new spirit will I put within thee ; I will take away the stony heart out of thy flesh, and I will give thee a heart of flesh ; ’ on which

* Brown’s Gospel Truth, p. 45, 1st ed.

words thou hast caused thy servant to hope. In the faith that thou wilt fulfil thy word, I renew and ratify my former covenant, and swear myself to be the Lord's for ever in a perpetual covenant. Wherefore I not only with my hand, but with my heart, set to my name,

EBENEZER ARESKINE, thy sworn servant."

This interesting document is without date. It obviously refers, however, to a previous transaction of the same nature; and we have to state that his Diary, though it does not contain precisely the same form of words, records similar exercises bearing a variety of dates. In more than one, his wife and family are expressly associated with himself in the surrender he makes to God; and all of them, while a few expressions might perhaps admit of improvement, breathe, on the whole, a spirit equally devout and evangelical. He deliberately professes his entire acquiescence in Christ as his only Saviour and righteousness; and the recognition of his obligations to holy obedience is accompanied with humble dependence on that promised grace, without which, he knew, he could do nothing. We have already seen an instance of his covenanting so early as in the month of November 1708.* It seems proper, however, to introduce, at least, another example of this exercise, which took place at a time when, with peculiar solemnity, he returned to the Lord, after a season of declension.

"*December 14, 1713.* Betwixt 7 and 8. P. M. This afternoon, the Lord has been setting mine iniquities before me, reproving me of sin, and letting me see how

* See above. p. 85.

vile I am ; how every clause and article of the covenant of works, every command of the broken law, is crying for wrath and vengeance against me. I see I am undone for ever in myself ; and that vengeance through eternity will pursue me, if I get not into Christ. In this case I went to God in prayer, and acknowledged mine iniquities, and in particular the sin that lies heaviest on my conscience, and professed to him my sincere resolution to forsake all known iniquity, and ‘ mine iniquity,’ in a particular manner. And thereupon I was made to renew, and come under a solemn covenant before the Lord, saying, Lord, if I have done iniquity, through thy grace, I am resolved to do so no more. I flee for shelter to the blood of Jesus, and his everlasting righteousness ; for this is pleasing unto thee. I offer myself up, soul and body ; unto God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I offer myself unto Christ the Lord, as an object proper for all his offices to be exercised upon. I choose him as my Prophet for instruction, illumination, and direction. I embrace him as my great Priest, to be washed and justified by his blood and righteousness. I embrace him as my King, to reign and rule within me. I take a whole Christ, with all his laws, and all his crosses and afflictions. I except against none of them. I will live to him, I will die to him ; I will quit with all I have in the world for his cause and truth. Only thou must be *surety* for me,* and fulfil in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness. Thou must fulfil both thy own part and my part, of this covenant ; for this is the tenor of thy covenant, ‘ I will be their God, and they shall be my people ; I

* On the nature of Christ’s suretiship, see Boston’s View of the Covenant of Grace, Head II.

will put my spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes ; when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee ; I will never, never, never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Lord, upon these terms, I renew my covenant this night ; and I take heaven and earth, angels and men, sun, and moon, and stars, the stones and timber of this house, to witness, that upon these terms, I give myself away, in soul and body, in estate, and all I am or have in this world, unto God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And upon these terms I subscribe myself,

Thy sworn servant for ever,

EB. ERSKINE."

He adverts to the renewing of his covenant about eight months after, on the evening of Sabbath, August 1, 1714, on which he had assisted in administering the Lords' Supper at Orwell. At this moment, as well as for some time preceding, he, in common with many others of the Presbyterian clergy, had reason to anticipate the approach of suffering for righteousness sake. His entry here is concluded in the following manner :

" — I recognised in secret, the solemn dedication I had made of myself in public, and avowed the Lord to be my God. I was made to say that, through his grace, I would die for him, and would die at a *gibbet* for him, if he would be with me to carry me through. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord. O I see him to be an all-sufficient portion and heritage. I commit myself unto him. I give myself, my wife, my children, my servants, my whole family, my substance in a world, my flock, unto him. Oh that he would bless me, and all that concerns me, Amen, Amen, Amen."

Conformably to the sacred engagements into which he thus repeatedly entered, he exercised a *conscientious fidelity* in cleaving both in principle and practice, to his Saviour and his God. From his own memorandums, it appears that he was no stranger to temptation; that, however, he made a noble resistance; and that, in opposing the suggestions of the devil and the workings of depravity, he availed himself of the weapons which sound reason can furnish, but especially of the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and earnest persevering prayer. His successful opposition to a violent temptation to unbelief respecting our Lord's incarnation is thus detailed.

“*Sept. 7, 1713.*—I found my vile unbelieving heart raising many doubts about the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God, as a thing impossible. It was a blasphemous thought sometimes suggested, as if Jesus of Nazareth were but an impostor; which I tremble to mention. But I think there is enough to silence unbelief on this head, when I consider, 1, That all the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled exactly in him, particularly these, Is. liii. Dan. ix. at the close, and Is. vii. 14. ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ 2, History tells us that the Scribes and Pharisees, being filled with wonder at his wise questions and answers, looked on him as the Messiah, and entered his name, *Jesus the Son of God and of Mary.* 3, The doctrine which he taught has the stamp of heaven upon it. 4, The miracles which he wrought, were a confirmation of his mission, and of his doctrine, and showed him to be sent of God. 5, He not only wrought miracles himself; but conferred this power upon others;—power to cast out devils, and

command things in heaven, things on earth, and things under the earth, to bow at the name of Jesus. 6, The very thought and remembrance of him, is sweet to my soul. 7, His word, which he taught, has a convincing power with it on the conscience of a sinner, unto this day. O Lord, establish me in the faith of this great gospel-truth, which is worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners. 8, How many thousands have died martyrs, and sealed the truth of it with their blood. O if it were not a truth of eternal verity, I were undone, undone for ever."

The same unfeigned sorrow for the operations of unbelief with regard to this capital article of the Christian faith, and the same ardent desire to subdue them, are strongly expressed at another time, as follows:

"*Jan.* 26, 1714, between 7 and 8 at night. This day being abroad about the business of my calling in the parish, and keeping Session in Ballingry at Mr. Wardrope's desire, who is sick at Dysart; after I came home, I came to my closet, and began to apply my thoughts to spiritual things. I found myself ready to sink, and drown, and perish, under the power of unbelief. My soul was overwhelmed with it so as to doubt the reality of the mystery of godliness. I had some little view of the majesty of God in an absolute way; and this made me call in question the truth of the incarnation of the Deity in the person of the Son, the distance of the two natures being so great; though, in the mean time, I thought it sweet matter of eternal triumph and rejoicing, upon supposition of the truth of it. I have got a loan of Pascal's Thoughts of Religion, this day, from Sir Robert Douglas. I looked a little on it, and found a chapter concerning Christ, and

the proofs of his being the Christ. This did give me a little assistance, and helped my unbelief. After this I took the Bible, and read the 20th chapter of Matthew; where I saw yet more of Christ, and particularly in that word: ‘The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ I saw something of the glory of Christ in curing the two blind men with a touch of his hand; which could be done by none but God himself. This did farther establish and confirm my faith. After this, I went to pray, and found some life; but was much troubled with a dead, wavering, heart. I saw much of the depravation of my nature, and aversion from God, and inclination towards vanity, in the wanderings of my heart. O I regret, if I could, with tears of blood, the prevalence of unbelief, and the sad bent that I find in my heart, to depart from the living God. It was my desire to the Lord, I remember, that he would even make my soul to clasp around him, and that he will clasp my soul in his everlasting arms, that I may never depart from him. O I think my faith is faint and languid; I long to have it encreased; and the Lord will satisfy the longing soul, and fill my hungry soul with good things. O to be established and confirmed,—‘strong in the faith, giving glory to God.’”

A future state of existence is another fundamental article of religion he was sometimes tempted to question; but this temptation also, he firmly and successfully repelled. He thus describes his exercise on one occasion:

“*December 28, 1713, about 10 o'clock P. M.* I have for a long time been tempted to doubt of a life to come, or a future state; and this evening my wife and I, after

supper, had a discourse on this topic, and several arguments presented themselves to me, which were very convincing : such as, 1, If there be no life after this one, it follows, that beasts are as high as men ; there is no difference between the rational and irrational creatures ; both perish alike at death. 2, The wicked would be the most happy men in the world, and the godly would be the most miserable, if in this life only they had hope ; which is inconsistent with the equity and justice of God. 3, There would be no difference betwixt sin and virtue. 4, The devil would never be at such pains to tempt men, and draw them to sin, because, instead of tempting to what is hurtful to them, he would tempt them to their happiness ; for the pleasures of sin would be the great happiness of men, if there were no life to come. 5, Because the Bible would be but a fable ; no reality in it. 6, God would be a liar, which it is blasphemy to imagine ; he having in his word asserted that there is a reward for the righteous after this life. 7, All preaching, praying, praising, is to no purpose ; and saints in all ages have been arrant fools, to suffer so many hardships, in hope of a future life."

" These arguments convince me, beyond all manner of dispute, that there is a life to come after this ; and I am persuaded all the devils in hell will never be able to answer them, nor all the foolish suggestions of an unbelieving heart. The Lord establish me in the faith of this great truth, more and more."

The tenderness of his conscience was discovered, not only in combating temptations to error, but also in avoiding every appearance of sin. With holy solicitude, he watched and resisted the first risings of depravity in his heart, and studied to keep every appetite and

passion under due control. It was his constant endeavour, for example, to repress the motions of that secret pride and self-applause, which is apt to prevail against even good men, to whom public and important duties are assigned.

“I was this day tempted with pride,” says he, March 8, 1715, “and a vain elation of mind, on the composition of a sermon which pleased me, and which I was preparing for Edinburgh Sacrament on the 20th of this month. It is a wonder that the Lord,—he who beholds the proud afar off,—does not blast me in some visible way, on this account. I prayed to the Lord, to deliver me from pride of gifts. O it is a hateful sin. O Lord, keep me from it; and help to be humble, to be like Christ; and to preach Christ, and not to preach myself.”

The resolutions contained in the following entries, with regard to a certain indulgence to which, without question, many Christians, as well in public as in private stations, have been immoderately addicted, may to some appear weak and superstitious; but they will commend themselves to others, as exemplifying a minuteness of Christian vigilance, not unworthy of a rational and a vigorous mind.

“*Aug.* 20, 1714. This evening, while I was shearing some tobacco to be snuff, I had a check for my excesses in the use of it; and that because, in my last fever, I resolved to leave it, and because what I spend in this way, if bestowed in charity, would do good to some of the poor people of God; and besides, I am too much under the power of it. When I was thinking that I might leave it afterwards, that scripture came in upon me, ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with

thy might.' On this consideration, I again resolved that I will be more moderate in the use of it than I have been, and if I can, I will endeavour to quit it altogether. O Lord, deliver me from every evil word and work; and let me never lay any sin whatever in the balance with the light of thy countenance, or the least smile thereof. O kill every lust and idol in my heart, by the virtue of the blood of the Lamb."

"Nov. 8, 1714. The great Apostle, if it would offend his brother, would eat no flesh while the world standeth; and when it offends my own soul, and is a breach of my covenant-engagements to God upon a sick bed, to continue in the use of this, shall not I forsake it? And therefore, through the grace of God, from this time and forward, I am resolved to fulfil my vow to the Lord, and to quit the use of snuff; except I see some evil consequence and fruit to follow upon it, prejudicial to my health, or sight, or the like: For I reckon that in that case, it would be sin for me not to use it as a *medicine*. Every creature of God was designed for the service of man; but man was never designed to serve any creature; which we become guilty of, when we are so wedded to the use of it, that we cannot want it, though the necessity of nature does not call for it. O that I, through the Spirit, may be helped to mortify the deeds of the body, that I may live. It is an inverting of the very order of nature, when man becomes a slave to any of the inferior creatures. God did put all things under his feet, to be as it were, servants to him; but when we come under the power of any thing, whether lawful or sinful, we invert the order that God has made, give inferior creatures the authority; and we become servants unto them, by the worst kind of servitude and

slavery,—to be under the power of a lust, or corrupt inclination of the flesh. The Apostle Paul resolves on this account, to beat down the body, and to keep it in subjection ; comparing it to a wild beast, that must be daunted, and tamed with stripes and severity. It is necessary for me therefore, I find, both as a creature and as a Christian, that I keep my soul in its room, and my body in its own room also, that I keep inferior creatures in their own room, and make them subject to me and to the great end of my being, and not me a slave to them. I must use the creature only in a subservient way.”

In none of the subsequent entries, does any allusion to the use of snuff occur ; from which it seems probable that his determination respecting it had been carried into effect.

A deep-toned *spirituality of mind* was a distinguishing lineament in Mr. Erskine's character ; and some further illustrations of it, supplied by his diary, will form an appropriate conclusion to this chapter. About the close of the year 1708, he was obliged, it appears, to engage in a law-suit with some individual who refused to pay a just debt. This business, however, put him, in a manner, out of his element. He much regretted its necessity ; and he candidly acknowledges what he felt, of the unhappy tendency of such affairs, to obstruct divine communications, and secularize the mind.

“ Dec. 28, 1708. I was called to go to Edinburgh lately upon a law business ; but O it was a sad business to me. I have lost my wonted liveliness. I find that I no sooner concern myself with the world, than my

heart clings and cleaves to it. O the mass of iniquity that is in my heart ; I deplore the carnality of it. I have been under a lamentable deadness this some time past ; but this night in prayer, I thought I got my bands a little loosed. I got sweet freedom in prayer, liberty to plead the promise. If it were possible, I would be content to take a whole Godhead, a Trinity, into my heart. Lord, make a gale of the wind of thy Spirit blow open the everlasting doors, that a way may be made for thee into my heart and soul. O come, Lord Jesus, who art highly exalted ; do thou grant me grace for grace out of thy fulness. O come to me, and when come, do thou stay, and make thy abode."

A few days after, he adds : " Jan. 2, 1709, Sabbath, after Sermon. My tongue was loosed to ask of God in prayer. I was made to pray, particularly, that the Lord would deliver me from the smiles of this world, from being entangled with worldly business ; and that he would deliver me from the plagues of my own evil heart, from pride, from unbelief, from instability, from atheism. And that which I founded my expectation upon was, that these things were agreeable to his will ; and that it is the Mediator's work in heaven, to intercede with the Father, that his people here on earth may be kept from the evils of the world, and from offending God. And sure I am, I cannot but be heard, when asking the same things which Christ is asking for me."

A genuine readiness of disposition to derive sacred lessons from external objects and providential occurrences is usually regarded as indicating a spiritual mind. In addition to the proofs of such a temper included in the foregoing extracts, we have another me-

morale instance in the following brief entry ; the precise date of which is now illegible, while the one immediately preceding, is dated September 23, 1714.

“ There is an account come, of the arrival of King George, and a great rejoicing for it in Edinburgh. I see the fires and illuminations of that city, reflected on the skies. O how will the heavens reflect and shine with illuminations, when the King of kings and Lord of lords shall erect his tribunal in the clouds, and come in his own glory, and his Father’s glory, and in the glory of the holy angels. O what a heartsome day will that be. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with him in glory. We shall then lift up our heads with joy, because it shall be a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

Human nature is so constituted, that whatever deeply engages our attention by day is apt also to employ our thoughts by night ; and the meditations of our waking hours seldom fail to influence the workings of the imagination in our dreams, when asleep. On this principle the following memorandums may give us a high idea of the ascendancy which the concerns of God and eternity possessed in the writer’s mind.

“ *Tuesday morning, August 17, 1708.* Being the week immediately before our sacrament, I was laying in my closet-bed sleeping ; and I thought in my sleep that I got my head thrust out of time into eternity ; and O what ravishing glory did I then behold. I thought I saw nothing but glory, glory ; and that I could see no corporeal form or representation of any thing ; but only my heart leapt, and beat, and panted within me, to have more and more of this glory, and to be swallowed up for ever in it.”

“ *October 19, 1713.* Last night when I fell asleep, I was in a good frame. I was filled with soul-elevating apprehensions of the glorious majesty of the infinite and eternal Godhead, and this filled me with soul-debasing and humbling thoughts and apprehensions of myself. I thought, at the time, it was a pity to fall asleep in such a case. However, I did fall asleep, the necessity of the clay tabernacle, after preaching through the day, requiring it. Yet the Lord did not leave me, even when I was sleeping; for I found him coming in upon my soul, as it were, with an overpowering flood of joy and consolation, and my soul, as it were, enlarging and widening herself, to receive more of the Lord. How eager was my soul in its motions and desires after the Lord; and O what sweet satisfaction did it yield to my soul, to find myself so near to God! My heart leapt for joy, to think of its relation to the Lord, and of his wonderful kindness.”

“ *August 4, 1714.* I dreamed that I was at Jerusalem, and when I was there, I thought I remembered the sweet and pleasant days that David had in that place of old; and I sung in my sleep the words of the Psalmist,

‘ Jerus’lem, as a city, is
Compactly built together,’ &c.

I remembered that this city was a type of the church of Christ; and that Christ had now come, and had done his work, making sacrifice and oblation to cease.”

These passages are by no means introduced here, in order to foster enthusiasm, or to countenance the delusion of those who imagine, that because they have had a pleasant dream respecting Christ or the new Jerusalem, they are authorised to conclude, in the absence

of proper Scriptural evidence of true Christianity, that they are the children of God and the heirs of glory. Not to dilate on this caution, it will gratify the pious reader to see one or two examples of Mr. Erskine's devotional feelings, when awaking from sleep.

“*April 12, 1710.* This morning, when I awakened, I was full of awful impressions of God. The Lord made glorious discoveries of himself unto me. I thought he was in me, and about me. My soul was delighted with the discovery, and I was made to wish and pray that the impressions of God I then had, might continue with me all the days of my life. When I was under these impressions, I thought I durst not allow myself in any known sin for a world.”

“*September 20, 1721.* This morning, a little after I awakened, I began to turn my thoughts towards the Lord Jesus; and the Lord encouraged me in my endeavour, by a sweet gale of his Spirit, testifying of him to me; for my meditation of him was sweet. I could say that his love is better than wine; yea, that his loving kindness is better than life, and all the comforts of life. My heart did burn within me, while I thought of him who is Immanuel, and whose name is Wonderful; and what can I say more? O that I may ascend in a glow of love to him, to be with him for ever.” “I am apprehensive,” he adds, “that this is before some cloud of darkness or trial coming upon me. Lord, prepare me for it.”

The manner in which his mind was occupied during a comparatively sleepless night, is thus pleasantly described:

“*January 31, 1715.* I did not sleep well this last night. I lay waking, almost between 12 and 2 in the

morning. But it pleased the Lord to make it for the most part a sweet time to me. The Lord was pleased to give me some sweet views of wonderful Jesus, so that I could in some measure say with David, Ps. lxxiii. 5, 6, ‘My soul was satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth did praise thee with joyful lips; when I did remember thee upon my bed, and meditate upon thee in the night watches;’ and verse 8, ‘My soul followeth hard after thee.’ I was refreshed to find the kindly warming of my soul towards this amiable Lord. I was made to bless him that ever kindled this fire in my breast, and to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. I am sure that where he draws the soul with loving kindness, he hath loved with an everlasting love; and those whom he hath loved with an everlasting love, he will never cast away; for he rests in his love, and changes not. It cannot be that ever he will cast away the soul that loves him so dearly, as, through his grace, I feel myself to do. I think that the flames of love to Christ in the heart cannot stand with the flames of hell. Yea, such flames would do much to mitigate and extinguish the flames of hell,—they burn so sweetly and strongly. O that I may feel more and more of it.”

In the preceding quotations we have repeatedly seen such expressions of ardent panting after entire deliverance from every trace of corruption, and after the immediate and full enjoyment of the Saviour as afford abundant evidence of an eminently spiritual mind. There are two passages more of the same heavenly character, which cannot with propriety be omitted. The one is the very first entry in the Diary, which is as follows:

“*November 22, Saturday, 1707.* About 5 o’clock at

night, I sat down on my knees, and went about the duty of prayer. I felt a great deal of deadness; and yet I thought I had some, though very little, life. After prayer, I proceeded to the work of meditation; and O it was sweet. I cannot tell how I was; but O how did I long to be in heaven, to be free from sinning, to be free from a carnal wandering heart. What high thoughts had I of God, and of Christ. O to be where Christ is, and where the glorious company of the redeemed are! How welcome will Christ make me when I come to heaven! How will angels welcome me! How will the saints of God welcome me; and how sweetly will they and I join together in singing the praises of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! O to be above with Christ! Amidst all these sweet thoughts that I had, I had these texts sweetly borne in upon me, ‘He will speak peace to his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly;’ ‘He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.’ I was also filled with earnest desires that the Lord would make me a blessed instrument of doing good to souls in this congregation of Portmoak; that he would help me to commend precious Christ unto them, and to speak to his commendation. O that the Lord would take me out of an evil world, or keep me from the evil of the world.”

The other passage referred to begins with lively expressions of gratitude to God for his goodness, and closes with the statement of an interesting reason for mingling resignation to the will of God as to the time of his departure, with the most vehement longing for the heavenly bliss:

“*Friday, August 27, 1714.* This night, in family

worship, I got some most satisfactory and engaging discoveries of the goodness of God, and of his kindness and care towards his people, and towards my family. I was made to praise him particularly for many unseen mercies, which were never perceived by me; and especially for the ministration of his good angels. I was made to wonder that he should make these good angels ministering spirits to the like of me, against whom he might arm the whole creation. O it is a wonder that any of God's creatures should do us service, but yet more so, that these glorious creatures should minister for our good. And O it is yet infinitely more love, that the eternal Son of God came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. It is little wonder that the angels be ministering spirits to the elect, when the God of angels, their great Lord and Creator, was pleased to take upon him the form of a servant, and was made like unto me in all things, sin only excepted. I remember that I would have thought it a privilege to be near unto death, that I might be nearer to the enjoyment of the ever-blessed Immanuel, to behold his glory, and sing his hallelujahs in the higher house. O it is reviving and supporting to my soul, to think that the time is coming, when I shall be for ever with the Lord, perfectly free of sin, and of every thing that now separates between him and me. O I love him and desire him above all things. I remember that in prayer I expressed some longings to be away to sing hallelujahs to the worthy Lamb; and in the very time of these longings this thought darted in upon me, 'The longer that I live here, I will have the more matter of praise through eternity.' It is sweet to live in this world, and to live long in it, that

I may daily gather fresh experience of the Lord's goodness, as matter of praise in heaven. The longer that I live, I will be always the deeper and deeper in debt to free grace. I think, if ever I come to heaven, my note and song will be more loud and shrill than any of the inhabitants of that house which is not made with hands. O the depths of his grace and love towards me."

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Erskine's attention to the means of spiritual progress—Personal exercises—Reading the Scriptures—Examples of pious reflexions on passages read—Devotional books—Prayer and intercession—Praise—Meditation and self-inquiry—Family-worship—Public ordinances, particularly the Lord's Supper—Inter-course with Ministers—Correspondence with private Christians—Improvement of dispensations of providence—Writing a Diary.

THE chief purpose to be served by a delineation of the moral and spiritual excellencies of distinguished men, is, no doubt, to allure others to copy their example. Our laudable endeavours to emulate the righteous, however, will not only be directed, but mightily animated, by a correct account of the means which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, proved effectual for enabling them to reach those Christian attainments in which they excelled. It seems proper, therefore, to lay before the reader some statements contained in Mr. Erskine's record of his Christian experience, bearing principally on the use he made of divine ordinances, and on the various methods he employed for accelerating his progress in the path of holiness. These statements, indeed, have unavoidably been anticipated, in some degree, by the extracts brought forward in the preceding chapter. But more circumstantial materials relating to this view of his conduct still remain; and a

selection from them will at once throw additional light on his character, and point out the way by which eminent godliness has been usually attained and promoted.

This exemplary man attended faithfully to the *personal exercises of devotion*. Instead of performing these duties rarely, or in a superficial and cursory manner, or merely with a view to preclude the clamorous accusations of conscience, he engaged in them with frequency, with deliberation and solemnity, and with heart-felt delight.

We have seen that, after the happy change that took place in his views and feelings, he placed a cordial esteem on the Scriptures as an accredited and invaluable revelation of the will of God. His gratitude for the Bible is often expressed, as in these words :

“*March 16, 1709.* This night, about 8 o’clock, I sat down upon my knees to pray, and the Lord was pleased to let me know something of his gracious presence. I was helped to praise him for his word, for his blessed Bible; that ever He, the great and infinite Jehovah, condescended to make known his will to the like of me, and unto me in particular. I was made to bless God for the freedom of the blessed way of salvation, for the firmness of the blessed covenant, and for what he has spoken in his word. O it is sweeter than honey from the honey-comb; more excellent than gold, yea, than the finest gold. O that the Lord would help me to exercise faith continually on his word. O let never unbelief any more prevail against me.”

Whilst the Scriptures thus attracted his veneration and love, he read them daily in his study; attending carefully to their precious contents, and gladly receiving those refreshing draughts which they afford to the

weary and thirsty soul. For this purpose, he rose early in the morning,—sometimes long before the dawn of day; and when the labours of the day were ended, he renewed the delightful exercise, often betwixt 7 and 8 o'clock, sometimes at a much later hour.

“*Portmoak, Aug. 18, 1714.* Between 7 and 8 at night. Having been abroad through the day, visiting my Lady *Strenrie*, I came home about two hours ago. I have since been endeavouring to turn my thoughts towards soul-concerns. I have had some very awful impressions of eternity, which filled me with fear and consternation. However, the 4th chapter of John’s Gospel, which I read, yielded me relief and enlargement. I saw Christ in the preciousness of his word, through the whole. I saw him in the word, v. 6th; ‘Jesus being wearied, sat on the well.’ O wonderful! the great God, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, sitting in such a posture, *wearied* with a journey. O stupendous condescension, that he took on him the sinless infirmities of our nature. I saw something of him also in the word, v. 10th; ‘If thou knewest the gift of God,’ &c. O wonderful gift indeed! O amazing love, that God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. I see from these words, that Christ loves to have himself known to sinners. I see here also, that as soon as the soul knows Christ, it desires to partake of his fulness. I see here also, that Christ is most willing and ready to communicate of his fulness unto them that ask it of him. ‘Thou wouldest have asked of him,’ says he, ‘and he would have given thee living water.’ After I had done reading, I went to prayer; and what I had read furnished me with cou-

rage and confidence. I said with myself; Oh! he that condescended to meet this woman, and manifest himself to her as the Messiah,—he is as condescending still, as ready to take employment, and to communicate of his fulness; and, therefore, I may be emboldened to ask of him what I need. I ground my hope, in time, and through eternity, only on his death and satisfaction, which I see to be of such infinite value, that it is able to ransom ten thousand worlds; for it is the blood of the great and everlasting Lord, who created the world.”

“*Dec. 22, 1714, between 4 and 5 in the morning.* I read in my ordinary, the 7th chapter of Luke; where, at the close, we are told of the woman that was a sinner, who came, while Christ was at a feast in a Pharisee’s house, and washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and anointed them with ointment; to whom Christ said, that her sins were forgiven her; her faith had saved her; and she loved much. In reading these passages, I got a sweet view and discovery of Jesus as God-man, and as a Redeemer. My soul delighted in him; and O how much did I wish to have been in the place of this poor woman! How great was her privilege! But it is comfortable to me to think on that word, John xx. ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’ O I believe; Lord, help my unbelief.”

“*Feb. 1, 1715.* This morning my heart would not move towards God, or Christ, or spiritual things. But, blessed be his name, in reading John xvi. he was pleased to draw the vail a little aside, and I could say with the disciples, ‘Did not my heart burn within me, while he talked with me’ in the word? Oh! all his words are words of wonder, words of grace, words of love; they

are all spirit and life. His words are known by the lustre, beauty, sweetness, majesty, and authority, that is in them. They go through the very soul; and sweeten the innermost corners of the heart with a joy that is unspeakable,—a joy that is a continual feast, and with which a stranger doth not intermeddle. How sweet is that word, v. 7th, ‘It is expedient for you that I go away,’ &c. and verses 13, 14, 27, 33.

“*Feb. 3, 1715.* between 7 and 8 at night. Christ is precious to my soul. O I cannot think of parting with him. This is the only rest of my soul in time, and through eternity. He is the very kernel of heaven; and heaven would not be heaven, if it wanted him. I read this night the 20th of John’s Gospel. How sweet is that word, and full of grace; ‘Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God.’ His words make the sweetest melody in the soul, that ever was heard. Every word of his mouth is like tried gold, durable and valuable. O I long for the immediate enjoyment of him in the land that is very far off; but yet I am in a strait. Jordan is deep, and the sight of it frightens me; but I know that if I get the eyes of my soul fixed by faith on the Canaan above, death will be so far from frightening me, that I will lift up my heart at its approach, and welcome it as a herald sent to summon me to take possession of the crown and kingdom which my Friend and elder Brother has prepared and bought for me. O joyful day. Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

“*Sep. 12, 1716.* I have been for a long time reading in the Old Testament, and took a kind of gleanings afterwards at the New; and, therefore, this morning, after I had read a chapter in my ordinary, in the Old Tes-

tament, viz. the 1st of the Song, I turned over and read the first chapter of Matthew. And O I thought I found his very name in the first verse, as ‘ ointment poured forth ;’ particularly v. 21st, ‘ Thou shall call his name JESUS ; for he shall save his people from their sins.’ ”

Though a decided preference was given to the sacred volume, other books relating directly to experimental and practical religion were not neglected ; and, indeed, as the bee gathers honey from every flower, this diligent Christian was prepared to reap spiritual benefit from every work in Theology or Church History, that he perused. It will gratify his admirers to see his own notices, respecting some of the publications he valued, and found truly beneficial.

“ *Dec. 21, Sabbath, 1707.* In my closet I began to read Horton’s Orthodox Evangelist, concerning the state of the blessed. In reading, my heart fluttered. After I had done with reading, I sat down to pray ; and O it was pleasant. I longed to be gone out of this weary wilderness. I desired to be absent from the body, that I might be present with the Lord. And yet, Lord, if thou hast any service for me here, I am content to stay. *If it were but to bring in one soul to the knowledge of thee, I am content to live, though it were Methuselah’s days upon the earth.* But I would *fain* be away. I would *fain* have a harp put into my hand, to join with the blessed company around the throne of the Lamb. Lord, whilst thou keepest me in the world, keep me near thyself, and far from sin.”

“ *Nov. 30, 1710.* I had been reading a passage of Echard’s Ecclesiastical History concerning the ascension of Christ, and his sitting down at the right hand

of God, as Head and King of the Church, and the Advocate of lost sinners. And O how I was made to wonder and rejoice at the thought of this, that I have such a blessed Friend above to take my part before the holy and righteous God; one that is so nearly related to the glorious majesty of God, and so nearly related to me, being bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. What a blessed ground of courage and confidence is this !”

“*Dec. 22, 1713.* Last week, when I was at the Presbytery, I borrowed a copy of Owen on beholding the Glory of Christ, John xvii. 24. And in reading it, my soul was wonderfully refreshed and confirmed; for as a man sees his face in a glass; and as the seal is to the stamp of it on the wax, so did my experience answer what is spoken by that holy man. O I find a sweet suitableness in those views and discoveries of the glory of Christ which I have had, to what he speaks. As he says, I find the life of my soul, and the life of all my religion, if I know any thing of it, to lie in views and discoveries of the glory of the ever-blessed and exalted Immanuel, God with us.”

We have seen his notice of Pascal’s *Thoughts on Religion*, as a work which served, in the year 1714, to assist him in rebutting temptations to unbelief. One of his Note-books written about that time, it may be stated, contains an extract from that interesting performance. The writings of the pious Halyburton, Rutherford, and Trail, were also highly pleasing to his taste, and the happy means of comforting and establishing his heart.

“*June 9, about 8 at night, 1714.* At this present time, having been reading a part of Mr. Halyburton’s

Life, I find many of his experiences, which he relates, are to mine like a face in a glass ;—which is reviving to me, and gives me good hope, that matters are not so ill with me, as I apprehended. After a while's reading in this book, I went to prayer, and there I found the Lord indeed. I got discoveries of the blessed Immanuel, which revived and comforted me, and filled my soul with wonder and amazement. My soul longs for that happy day, when I shall see Christ, and behold his face, without any cloud to interpose between him and my soul. O that I could run my race, looking unto Jesus ! I find that a sight of him sets all right, and makes darkness, and deadness, and blindness, and hardness, to vanish and disappear. O that I may live in the continual view of him, and of his blood !”

“ *Nov. 24, 1720.* Thursday, being the Fast-day, at night. I have been reading Mr. Rutherford's Dying Testimony to the work of God in the land, and two or three of his Letters. After this a little, I and my daughter Jeanie were laying upon the window, the sky being clear, and the heavens full of stars ; and O the thoughts of Christ were sweet unto me. My soul loves him ; and I can say it, ‘ The desire of my soul is to him, and to the remembrance of his name ;’ and my soul is like a bird that would fain be out of the cage, that it might be at liberty to mount up on high. O that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away to my everlasting Rock and Redeemer. There is a fire of love burning in my soul to him, which I hope shall never be quenched, but burn for ever and ever. I got liberty, when laying over the window with my little daughter Jeanie, about fourteen years old, and when looking up to the heavens, to commend the glorious

Creator of all things, and particularly ‘ the bright and morning Star,’ and to speak to the honour of his name. It is the desire of my soul, to make his name to be remembered unto all generations.”

“ 1721, Saturday, about twelve of the day. I have been directed this forenoon to read in Mr. Trail, on the Throne of Grace, Heb. iv. last verse ; a text that has sometimes been sweet and pleasant to me, but I think never more sweet than this day. I bless the Lord, who directed that honest man to preach and write, on this blessed subject ; and I bless the Lord, that brought his book to my hand, and that directed me to read it this day. I read some of it with tears of joy, particularly p. 135, because I find it the very language of my soul many a time, where he has the words following :

‘ Are you saying, that since the Father is well pleased with the name of Christ, and the Son commands me to use it ; and the Holy Spirit has broke this name to me, and made it as ointment poured forth, and since its savour has reached my soul, I will try to lift it up as incense, to perfume the altar above. Since all that ever came in this name were made welcome, I will come also, having no plea but Christ’s name, no covering but his borrowed and gifted robe of righteousness. I need nothing, I will ask nothing but what his blood has bought ; and all *that* I will ask. I will expect answers of peace and acceptance, only in this blessed Beloved : beloved of the Father, both as his Son and our Saviour ; and beloved of all that ever saw but a little of his saving face and glory.’ And then, he adds, ‘ Let such go on and prosper ; the Lord is with you ; the Lord is before you ; he will welcome the Mediator in his bringing you to him, 1 Pet. iii. 18, and welcome

you with salvation, who come in his name for it. The Prodigal's welcome, Luke xv. is but a shadow of what ye shall meet with. Christ welcomes dearly all that come to him; and the Father welcomes the believer that comes in Christ's name, and is brought in Christ's hand to the throne.'

"In the reading of these words, my soul was melted with a flood of delight and joy. For, O Christ's name is to me as ointment poured forth; I desire to remember this name in all my addresses to God. O it is pleasant to come to a God in Christ, for this is the throne of grace, to which I may boldly come, to ask grace and mercy. Yea, in every thing, I may come with boldness, and make my requests known to God."

To an attentive reading of the Scriptures, and of esteemed practical and devotional books, Mr. Erskine, as is evident from these extracts, added fervent prayer, both stated and ejaculatory. It was his daily practice, to make frequent applications, in his closet, to the throne of grace, confessing his iniquities, pouring forth his sorrows, and imploring with humble confidence every necessary blessing. Regarding sin as the worst of evils, we find him often soliciting deliverance from it in its guilt and power; and beseeching God not only to cheer him with the light of his countenance, but also to conform him more and more to his image, and to strengthen him by his Spirit for the discharge of duty.

"*March 22, 1711.* After 10 at night. I was at secret prayer, and was made to pray for the Spirit to sanctify me; and I thought my faith got some sweet hold to sist upon in this matter. 1st, That God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him; and this is

one of his principal works in the souls of his people, to make them holy. 2dly, This word came in also on the back of it, which encouraged me to believe; ‘This is the will of God, even your sanctification.’ Is not this ground to believe, that he will give me his sanctifying Spirit, that when I ask his Spirit for this end, I am asking what he has promised, and what is agreeable to his will.”

“*Sept. 12, 1716.* After reading, I went to prayer, and I found more life and liberty than for a long time before. I could not but lament before the Lord, the prevalency of sin in my soul, and the lamentable power it has over me. I said before the Lord, words to this purpose, O Lord, I am firmly persuaded thou hast an interest in my soul; and shall thy interest be lowest, and the interest of sin uppermost? O blessed Jesus, is it not thy office to save thy people from their sin; from the guilt of it in justification, by thy perfect righteousness; from the filth and power of it in sanctification, for which end thou hast received the Holy Ghost, and art made of God sanctification?”

Saturday, —, 1722. I endeavoured to renew my hold of the Lord Jesus, and to cry that I might be found in him, in life and in death. I cried that the love of God in Christ might for ever eat up the love of self, the love of sin and of every lust, and that I might be made to say with Ephraim, ‘What have I to do any more with idols?’ Lord make an everlasting divorce betwixt me and every sin; and let all the remains of old Adam be destroyed in my soul.”

His petitions and thanksgivings often refer expressly to his ministerial character and labours. Accordingly he says,

“ *October 7, 1710.* I was made to plead the promise of Christ, ‘I will send the Comforter, and he shall abide with you.’ O that I had the abiding, the continued abiding of the Spirit to sanctify me, to assist me in my work, to oil my chariot wheels. Glory to God for the great Mediator, my blessed *Aaron*, from whom descends the oil of gladness on my soul.”

“ *November 15, 1711.* I was made to pray for help and strength in discharging my ministerial work, that I may have furniture from him who is ascended up on high to give gifts unto men, for the edification of his mystical body. Blessed be his name, he has carried me hitherto, and has not altogether left me. I may set up my Ebenezer, and say, ‘Hitherto hath the Lord helped.’ I have a good master to serve. I bear his commission, and therefore I believe he will be with me.”

“ *Saturday, December 11, 1714.* O for grace to spend this body of mine, and all the powers of my soul, in the service of that God who gave them both to me. O let me always see God, always enjoy him, and always be possessed with the fear and love of his excellent name, in every part of my *ministerial work* and *christian walk*.”

“ *February 1, 1715.* O to be taught of the Spirit how to conduct myself in every circumstance of my life, so as God may be glorified and souls edified. I remember I cried for the tongue of the learned to speak his praises, and commend him to poor souls. And with gifts, Lord, grant a suitable ballast of humbling and sanctifying grace, otherwise it were better for myself that I wanted edifying gifts altogether. But, Lord, give what is most for thy glory, and the edification of souls, and for my own soul also; for thou canst give all at

once. I am brought to see more of a reality in religion ; and of the weight and solidity of the truths of God in his word, and of the footing that faith has to found on it, as the word of God. Blessed be the author and finisher of faith."

He often prays, in particular, for that vigorous faith which he needed as a Christian and a Minister, that he might surmount every difficulty, overcome servile fear, and finish his course with joy.

" *March 16, 1709.* O that I may live continually in the sight and view of God. O that he may keep me honest in an evil day, and that he may be with me when he calls me to undergo trouble for his sake. I know that he will be with me in the fire and water ; for he hath spoken it, and he hath spoken it in ' his holiness.' I believe what he hath spoken is as sure as though I had it in hand ; yea, far surer ; for what I have in hand I soon lose, but what I have in the promise can never be lost, because it is in God's own keeping. ' Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.' "

" *January 11, 1714.* At 8 at night I went to secret prayer, and I was particularly led to plead with the Lord, that he would increase my faith. I see that if I could win verily to believe that the Bible is the word of God, and that all is true that God has there spoken, I might rejoice exceedingly. Glorious things are there revealed ;— a life to come, the resurrection of the body, the full enjoyment of the blessed Immanuel in heaven. O to have faith strengthened, and to believe, without doubting or disputing, the great truths of religion and the promises of the covenant ; I would always triumph, and trample on the moon of this vain world."

The supplications of this holy man, though remarka-

bly humble, and often accompanied with the tears of penitence, and even the cry of distress, were much characterized by the boldness of faith and the joy of hope ; and were, in many instances, immediately rewarded by gracious communications and delightful fellowship with God. This is evident from the following entries :

“ *January 8, 1712, betwixt 10 and 11 at night.* I remember this morning I was helped, I thought, to some direct actings of faith in God’s faithful word of promise ; and I observed this in my experience, that sweetness and satisfaction, peace and joy, immediately follow, when I am helped to trust in God’s word of promise, and to make a fair venture on his bare word, when I can feel nothing but deadness, and distance, and hardness. I find faith glorifies God, and can obtain any thing at his hand. I was helped this morning to ask some things agreeable to his will, and was made, I thought, to believe that he would give them, because he has said, ‘ Ask, and it shall be given,’ and ‘ Whatsoever you ask, believing, you shall receive.’ ”

“ *March 8, 1715, between 10 and 11 P. M.* This day has been for the most part cloudy and dark, though, blessed be his name, mixed with some sweet *blinks* and discoveries of God. At present, in secret duty, I was dull and dead at the beginning ; but before the close, my soul was enlarged like the chariots of Amminadib, and followed hard after the Lord. I was made to say, and to comfort myself in saying it, that I loved to retain God in my knowledge. My soul sweetly enlarged herself to receive the fulness of God, and I said, Lord, I love to be for ever swallowed up in this ocean of sweetness, grace, glory, and greatness, that is with thee. I open my mouth wide ; do thou fill it. Go on, Lord,

with the discovery that thou hast begun. I live, and resolve to die, in the hope that I shall yet have more and more of the Lord, because he has said that ‘his goings forth are prepared as the morning,’ ‘which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.’ I desire to dwell in God, and to have God dwelling in me. O praise, praise, praise, for ever and ever.”

In the fervent petitions and thanksgivings which this man of prayer offered up to God, in his retirements, he kept in view not only his own concerns, but those of others whom the bonds of nature or of Christianity obliged him to remember. The lively interest he took in the spiritual welfare of his wife and family is manifest from the terms formerly quoted, in which he expressed his dedication of himself and his house to the Lord. His intercessions on their behalf were frequent and appropriate.—“I was made to pray,” says he at one time, “for my wife, that the Lord would dispel her clouds, and fill her with joy and peace in believing. O that he would make her to behold the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of my God, so that she and I may rejoice together. And O that the Lord would do good to my poor babes, make them partakers of the divine nature, subdue iniquity in them, and sanctify them by his grace and spirit. At the same time, I was made to build upon the promises of the covenant, and to say, ‘In his word do I hope.’” At another time, after recording a remarkable enlargement of heart he had been favoured with, he adds in like manner, “I was made to pray for my poor children, and to give them away to the Lord. If I have any interest in them, I desire to resign my interest in them entirely to him. O that he would make them babes in grace,

and that something of God may begin to appear timeously in them."

His affection for other beloved relatives and for his Christian acquaintance operated in a similar way. How kindly, for example, does he mention his dear brother Ralph, when he was a candidate for license to preach the Gospel, as well as some other pious persons, in the following entry :

"*P. January 2, Sabbath, 1709.* After sermon, about 7 at night, I got my bonds in some measure loosed ; my tongue particularly was loosed to ask of God in prayer. Requests flowed in upon me, and I was helped to believe that the Lord would answer.—I was made to pray for the members of Christ every where, particularly for *Janet Paterson* and *Jean Rauvit*, and my brother Ralph. I was made to praise the Lord for his grace, wherein he abounded towards them, and to ask that his grace towards them might abound more and more, and that the Lord would assist my brother in the work that he was engaged in, and that he may be made a polished shaft in the hand of God, and an instrument to make known to sinners the name of the Lord."

The people of his charge were affectionately remembered in his daily supplications.—"*November 15, 1709*, about 10 at night. I was in prayer," says he, "and the Lord gave me some enlargement to pray that I might be instrumental in doing good to some souls in this congregation, and that I might be an instrument to build up a kingdom for him among this people. This is a thing that is according to his will, and it is for the glory of his own grace and goodness ; and whatever we

ask that is according to his will, and for the glory of his grace, he will not deny."

His prayers bear witness to the deep interest he felt in the cause of religion every where, and particularly in the preservation, the purity, and the prosperity of the Church of Scotland.—"*April 5, 1714.* I read in the Old Testament a part of the history of Joseph, and the wonderful providence of God in his advancement; in reflecting on which, I was furnished with this pleasant thought, that it is the great Lord who reigns, and that he doth what pleases him in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and that according to his promise, he will make all things work together for good to them that love him, and who are the called according to his purpose. This furnished me with ground of comfort and encouragement that, however dark and frowning the present aspect of providence towards them that fear God in this land, where the wicked are triumphing with the ball at their foot; yet if we could see into the womb of providence, we should find that there is a design of love on foot towards his own people, and all shall be turned about in the issue to God's glory, and the advantage of all that love him. On this ground I encouraged myself to address him in prayer, on behalf of his interest and people in this land."

The same warm attachment to the Church of Scotland which led him thus to beseech God to avert the dangers that threatened it towards the close of Queen Anne's reign, induced him also to implore the divine direction and support to those Twelve Brethren, who, about seven years after, united in making a noble stand in defence of the doctrine of grace.—"*August 15, 1721.*"

After prayer for the spirit to sanctify his own heart, he adds, “ I was helped in some measure to plead that the Lord would espouse his quarrel, in which a few of us are engaged on the behalf of some of the precious truths of God. The Lord led us forth to the field of battle ; and therefore I believe and hope that he will be with us, and appear for the cause of his own name, and that he will give us a mouth and wisdom which all our enemies shall not be able to withstand. O Lord pity the poor handful, and stand by them, and enable them to stand their ground, that they may not faint, when they see the strength of battle to be against them.

The prayers and intercessions of the closet seem to have been generally accompanied with another highly pleasant and beneficial, though much neglected exercise—*singing praises to God.*—“ *August 8, 1722.* This day I could not think there was the least spark of grace, or good in me or about me ; and I was thinking that I should never see the Lord any more. But O the trophies and triumphs of free grace ; for this night in family prayer the Lord did begin to loose my bonds, and both heart and tongue were loosed together, to my surprise ; and it was ordered in providence that, *in my ordinary in secret* this night, I did sing Psalm cxxxvi. where twenty-six times it is repeated, ‘ His grace and mercy never faileth ;’ and O the repetition of this word at every other line was sweet. I began to hope that I shall sing it as a new song through eternity, that ‘ His grace never faileth, his mercy endureth for ever.’ And I think that none in heaven will have more occasion to raise their hallelujahs of praise to free grace than I have.

O that the Lord may speak peace to me, so as I may never return to folly."

Some specimens have been given above of his pious *meditations* on the portions of Scripture he perused in his study. The following entry is concluded with a strong expression of the delight which he experienced in these solemn meditations.—*Sabbath, February 14, 1714.* I have got some sweet views of the Lord this night, having read the two last chapters of the Gospel of Mark. I saw that the blessed Jesus was dead and is alive, and lives for evermore; and my very soul was refreshed and rejoiced with the sight. In reading these chapters I got a view of his wisdom even in his silence before Pilate, and before the priests and elders, when accused of many high crimes. I saw that he was, out of love, content to be numbered with the transgressors. Although he could easily have vindicated himself, yet as he willingly became man, so he was willing to be held as the guilty person before men, that we might be held as righteous before God. But though he was silent when charged with these crimes, yet he witnessed a good confession; for when challenged by the high-priest, whether he were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, he openly told him that he was the Christ, and that they should see him one day coming in the glory of his Father; and when challenged by Pilate—if he was the king of the Jews, he freely owned it, whereby he left his enemies without excuse, having by his miracles, which he wrought openly before all, and likewise by the purity of his doctrine, given to the world, and particularly to the church, sufficient proofs and evidences that he was the Messiah. O the thoughts of these things

were sweet to my soul. The whole of it was sweet in reading, and yet sweeter, after I had done reading, when I began to *meditate* on what I had read."

Whilst it was his practice, after reading a chapter of the Bible, to spend some time in fixed and solemn meditation upon it, he was no stranger to those occasional reflexions which occur incidentally and often suddenly to the mind of a devout man. Of this we may give a single instance.—“ *August 6*, about 12 of the day, 1715. My soul is rejoicing at the sight of the majesty of God which I see. I am persuaded that he is; and Oh he is my *chief, chief* good. I see him in all his works, and wonder at his glory there. But O I shall wonder for ever at his taking on the nature of man. In his presence is fulness of joy, and rivers of pleasure.”

He not only meditated on the glories of Immanuel and the joys of eternity, but often communed with his own heart, and strictly *examined* his daily conduct and spiritual state. With what diligence he searched, and with what contrition he deplored his sins and backslidings, appears from various extracts formerly given. Omitting many other examples equally striking, we go on to notice that, although his self-investigation led to very humble confession, yet in consequence of the effects he was enabled to discern of the operation of divine grace on his heart and practice, it usually prepared the way for joyful assurance and lively gratitude. Hence he thus records his exercise on one occasion :

“ *Saturday, March 5*, 1715, at 12 noon. Studying my sermon for to-morrow, I was writing some marks of those who have sincere though weak grace; among which this was one, that their joy is placed especially on God in Christ, on the covenant, on things above; they

delight in prayer, in hearing, conference, and meditation on God and the things of God. I brought this mark particularly home to my own soul. And O my soul can appeal to the Lord, that there is nothing in all the world that ever I rejoiced in with such a solid, sweet, lasting, and overcoming joy, as in God, in Christ, in the covenant, in the blessed Bible. My soul rejoices only in the Lord; he is my strength and shield; he is my exceeding joy; and when he hides his face, all things are, as it were, clothed with blackness, and I can see nothing desirable in them."

On the day immediately following, being Sabbath, he was confirmed in this favourable conclusion regarding the state of his soul, by observing the harmony betwixt the external revelation, and the internal discoveries, of the character of God.

"I came up to my closet," says he, "and having prayed twice, the second time, the Lord was pleased to give a discovery of himself. My soul adored and admired his infinite greatness, and excellency, and his wonderful grace and condescension. I was made to bless him that ever made the day-spring from on high to arise on my heart, that ever made the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Christ, to shine in upon my heart. In the mean time, I was made to see a wonderful congruity and suitableness between the external revelation he has made of himself in the word, and the internal discoveries that he makes of himself to the soul by his Holy Spirit; which to me is at the same time a convincing evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures, and an evidence of the soundness and reality of his work upon my soul, and of the reality of those discoveries that he makes of himself to me. Do the

Scriptures speak of God honourably and loftily ; that he is infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely glorious, immense and incomprehensible, and infinitely condescending and gracious? I see him when he manifests himself, to be all this in an inexpressible way. Do the Scriptures speak of Christ as ‘ wonderful,’ ‘ the mystery of godliness,’ ‘ the brightness of the Father’s glory,’ ‘ one with the Father,’ ‘ full of grace and truth,’ ‘ all in all,’ as having ‘ the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,’ yea, ‘ all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him,’ as ‘ able to save to the uttermost?’ When the vail is drawn aside, and when the spirit of the Lord testifies of him unto me, my soul sees him to be all this, and infinitely more than I can express or conceive. My soul adores him, and shall adore him for ever and ever. I see that ‘ his goings forth are prepared as the morning ;’ every discovery being sweeter and brighter than another. When he returns unto me and discovers himself, I think I see always more of his greatness and of his sweetness, glorious grace, and other perfections, than ever I saw before. I was made at this time also to see and say, that if the Lord should let out himself upon me in any great measure, it would utterly overwhelm me. The weak crazy vessel, I see, is not able to bear much ; and therefore I do entirely refer myself to the management of infinite wisdom, and I reckon that any measure of manifestation that he gives is best for me. He knows my frailty, and suits himself to me accordingly. But when I come to glory, the vessel shall be filled brim-full, and every new discovery he makes of himself to me now enlarges the vessel a degree more, that so I may be capable to hold the more, when I come into the ocean of glory above. Thanks

be unto God for ever, for Christ his unspeakable gift; for it is only through him as my blessed Surety and Advocate, that God smiles at any time upon me. If he should look upon me as I am in myself, drowned in sin and guilt, he would even look me into hell, and cast me for ever out of his sight."

This man of God, while he assiduously performed the various duties of the closet, discovered an equal attention in compassing the domestic altar. He well knew that the ancient and scriptural practice of family worship is calculated, by the divine blessing, to promote the best interests at once of the head and all the members of the family. A few passages from his journal, relating partly to this exercise, may suffice to bear testimony to every reader, of the alacrity with which he assembled his household, at least morning and evening, to celebrate the praises of God, to read his word, and to call on his name, and of the sincerity with which he could assure all that make inquiry respecting the utility of such a service, that to him it proved a rich source of spiritual improvement and inexpressible delight.

"*Sabbath, October 30, 1708.* I had been under a great deal of deadness all the day long; but at night when I set about family worship, in the time of prayer the Lord gave me sweet enlargement. My mouth was filled with arguments in wrestling with him for heart-mollifying, sin-mortifying grace—grace to honour him, and to do him service."

"*January 11, 1712.* This night, at family worship, I read the 2d chap. of Luke about the birth of Christ, and the manner of his being introduced into the world. The Lord was pleased to reveal himself to me in read-

ing. I was made to wonder at the meanness of his birth, and at his intimating it, not to Herod or the great Rabbies at Jerusalem, but to the poor shepherds that were in the field. O how sweet is it to see Christ laying in the manger ; that blessed Morning-Star arising, as it were, out of the very dust. In prayer in the family after reading, I was as sweetly enlarged as ever I was in my life, to bless God for his unspeakable gift, and to cry to him to have Christ formed in my heart ; to have his glory advanced in the world ; and particularly for the church in this land, which has many enemies, who seem this day to be triumphing. But Christ lives, and he is set above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion ; and God hath given him to be Head over all things to the church, which is his body.”

“ *September 22, 1713, about 7 P. M.* I have it to remark that this has been a good day to me. In the morning the day was dark ; but about 12 it began to dawn, and both in secret duty and in family worship *at mid-day*, I found much of the Lord. O the sweetness of God’s face, and of the light of his countenance. And now again I am just risen from private prayer, and O my soul was refreshed therein. I cannot put into words what I felt of the goodness of the Lord.”

In addition to what may be gathered from these extracts, with regard to this clergyman’s method of conducting domestic worship, we have only to state further, that remarkable domestic occurrences were not overlooked in those prayers and thanksgivings which he offered up in the midst of his family. The following instance of this devout attention to the agency of a kind Providence, deserves to be recorded :

“ *Friday, May 28, 1714.* A remarkable providence

happened to my family, which should never be forgotten. Whilst the people were in the moss, casting peats, my wife and I being at home, my child, Ebenezer, was playing himself before the door, about half-way betwixt the moss and the house ; and before ever any of us were aware, a *stirk* or young cow runs a great way towards him, and goads him with her horns, to destroy him. I being in my closet, saw the beast tossing him and lifting him with her horns from off the earth. I thought the child was gone, and his mother also thought the same. Yet having come to the child, we found him perfectly sound and whole, without the least scratch or hurt upon his body, which was a wonder to us all. The beast had fastened its horns on the *white cap* which was on the child's head, and torn it off ; and yet the child not at all hurt. O how much am I obliged to the good providence of God, for the preservation of the poor child, who was a long time tossed and tumbled to and fro by the beast before any one could win to help him. But the Lord helped, and therefore I this day set up my Ebenezer, for hitherto hath the Lord helped. I came home and returned God thanks for his kind providence, and did the same in family-worship also. O that the Lord may sanctify this providence to me, to awaken and excite me to my duty."

Similar emotions of gratitude were stirred up by a providential escape, which was experienced by his daughter Jean, afterwards Mrs. Fisher. On Sept. 22, 1714, when the girl was returning with her parents from Kirkaldy, as she rode near them before a servant on a small poney, the poney stumbled and fell, on the road between Kirkness and Portmoak, "so that both the child and the lad tumbled over," as it is expressed, "at

the ears of the beast ;” and yet neither of them sustained the least hurt. “ I ascribe this,” says the pious and affectionate father, “ to my great, glorious, and good God, who gives his angels charge over me and mine, to keep us in all our ways. On coming home, I set up my Ebenezer ; and again at family-worship last night, God gave me great freedom in devoting myself and my wife, my children and family, to the Lord. O it was a sweet season to me. I may say *Jehovah-Shamma* to my soul ; for the Lord was there.”

Whatever importance he justly attached to the religious exercises of the closet and the family, he was fully aware of the special blessing annexed to the public institutions of religion ; and the same conscientious and persevering diligence with which he improved the former, appeared in his conduct with regard to the latter. Animated by the noblest motives in the discharge of his official duty, he was solicitous to promote the eternal welfare, both of his own soul, and the souls of his hearers. His preparations for appearing in the pulpit, at home and abroad, whether on ordinary or on more solemn occasions, whatever time, and labour, and anxiety, they might cost,—were by no means allowed to preclude that habitual attention to his own spiritual improvement, which his character, as a Christian, required. Whether the services of the sanctuary were conducted by himself or by his brethren, it was his unfeigned desire to profit by them ; and his narrative gives evidence that he was particularly careful to reap true and lasting benefit from the highly-valued opportunities of administering and receiving the Lord’s Supper. Nothing less can be inferred from the following entries :

“*July 11, 1712, Saturday morning.* I went to pray, and it pleased the Lord to give me some discoveries of Christ, when I was filled with desire of him, and was made to say, O Lord, I would desire nothing greater in the world, or through eternity, than to behold the wisdom of God manifested in Christ; the justice of God, the holiness of God, the mercy and faithfulness of God, manifested in Christ. And I was made to pray that I might have a sight of his blessed face to-morrow in the breaking of bread at *Orwell*. Happy they that are singing his praises, and beholding his face in heaven, who was dead, and is alive for evermore. O I would think it a happy life, to live in him, to live upon him, to live by him, and to live to him, for ever.”

“*Portmoak, Aug. 13, 1712, between 6 and 7, A. M.* I did celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in this place, on the 3d day of this month. There was much of the Master’s refreshing presence found therein. I myself, it is true, found but very little of his presence, either in preaching or communicating at that time; though there are none I have conversed with, who heard me, that have any savour of religion, but they found very much of the Lord’s presence in it:—whereby I see that the Spirit of the Lord is not confined to the minister’s frames, and that he may be with the people, when he is absent from the minister. But though I did not feel much life at the time, I think I have got as much good from this communion, as ever I got from any; for, almost ever since, I have had much more liveliness in duty than I had before. The remembrance of Christ has been fresh and savoury to me. I have been in some measure helped to carry about with me the dying love of the Lord Jesus. He has been exalted,

and set on high in my soul. I have been filled with adoring and admiring conceptions of him."

To these extracts we may add his memorandums of the edification he received from the ministrations of three excellent clergymen, Messrs. Gibb, of Cleish, and Ure, of Fossaway, and his own brother, Ralph :

"*July 30, 1714.* I have had many sweet discoveries of the Lord's goodness to me since the last time that I have here marked. I remember that the Lord gave assistance to deliver his mind upon the communion-day. Though in the time of the *action*,* I did not feel much sweetness, yet God gave me *through-bearing* grace ; and in the evening exercise by Mr. Gibb, I remember that I got some sweet views of the wonderful Immanuel, which made my soul to acquiesce, and to rejoice in him."

"*July 13, 1715.* Sabbath last I was at Dunfermline sacrament, assisting my brother. I found little of the Lord ; only I had some meltings of soul the Sabbath morning, in the time of my brother's *prayer before the action*. Yesterday, as I came home, my eyes were opened to see God—the infinite and invisible God, and the sight of him filled my soul with awe and dread, and a desire to have peace with him, more than any thing in all the world. The impressions continued with me a good part of the way, and also after I came home. O Lord, come with saving and soul-transforming discoveries of thyself to my soul."

"*Monday, May —, 1721.* In hearing Mr. Ure's sermon on Heb. xii. 2. 'Looking unto Jesus,' the Lord

* The *action* is an old Scottish designation for the sermon preached immediately before the administration of the Lord's Supper.

was pleased to loose my bonds and melt my heart, by filling me with some longings of soul after him, who is 'the desire of all nations.' My soul went along with what he said, when speaking of the attributes of Jesus, the offices of Jesus, the promises of Jesus, the fulness of Jesus, which he called us to look to. I bless the Lord, that refreshed my soul with his word in this sermon."

Mr. Erskine was alive to the comfort and advantage arising from the private intercourse and epistolary correspondence, as well as from the public labours of his brethren. No sooner did he begin to feel deeply the importance of vital religion, and the value of evangelical truth, than he gladly embraced opportunities of cultivating the friendship of those ministers, whom he respected for their piety and knowledge. The Rev. George Mair, of Culross, whose sincere godliness, ardent attachment to the doctrine of grace, and friendly dispositions, are honourably mentioned by Mr. Boston,* seems to have commanded his peculiar veneration. The following letter, preserved in short hand-characters, in one of his Note-books, shows how greatly he esteemed that worthy man, and with what alacrity he availed himself of his assistance in his religious inquiries. It affords, at the same time, a beautiful specimen of his general humility and docility of mind.

"Copy of a letter written by me to Mr. Mair,

Sept. 13, 1707.

"Rev. Sir,

I have had a design, for a considerable while back, to write you a letter, but was hindered

* *Memoirs*, pp. 40, 47, 57. 1st. ed.

therefrom through want of time or occasion. It would, I am persuaded, be my great advantage to have correspondence with you, either by word or writ; and I therefore would presume to be now and then troubling you with a line, if it would not be thought officious or impertinent. By this, however, I have adventured to break the ice.—I cannot but fully acknowledge, that ever since I had the honour to entertain you for a night in my cottage, and to enjoy a little conversation with you, I have had very savoury impressions of you; and, if I be not deceived, more suitable impressions anent the *freedom of the covenant of grace*; and although I bear the name (though most unworthy) of a master and teacher in Israel, yet I have need to be instructed even in the first principles of the oracles of God. And, therefore, I must entreat your thoughts more fully on that sweet subject; in regard I conceive it to be the very hinge of practical holiness and religion; and if a man be in the dark here, he cannot fail to stumble and fall. If it were not to be too much at once, I would also desire your thoughts upon this case.—When a person may be said to have closed with a promise? or how shall a person know that he has closed with it? I mean the absolute promise; for, as to the conditional promises, I scarcely think, at present, that ever I could lay claim to them as mine, in regard, I am in doubt if ever I truly closed with the first.

I thank you heartily for Goodwin's Pamphlet you have sent me. I shall, God willing, peruse and return it. I design also, to see you at your own house, though I cannot prefix the time. Hoping, when your convenience allows, you will let me hear from you, and that

you will bear me in mind when you go to the throne ;
I rest, with my respects to your yoke-fellow, Rev. Sir,

Your unworthy brother, and obliged servant."

A proper opportunity of adverting to the endearing communications that took place betwixt him and some other clergymen, will afterwards occur. But whatever confidence he reposed in ministers of worth, he was not indifferent to that pious and familiar conference with private Christians, which appeared subservient to mutual instruction and comfort. We have seen his ingenuous acknowledgments, respecting what he owed to his beloved wife, as, in a great degree, the means of his conversion. Her company and example, he was sensible, continued to afford him valuable aid, so long as it pleased providence to spare her ; and the recollection of them, even after her death, had a salutary influence on his feelings and conduct.

His sister, Mrs. Balderston, was another experienced Christian, to whom he looked for counsel and encouragement in the ways of piety. The Diary contains copies of several letters he wrote to her ; of which the following is the most important. It was written at that interesting period, when the revival of the law of patronage, and the imposition of the oath of abjuration, excited most distressing apprehensions among all the true friends of the Scotch Presbyterian Church.

"Portmoak, April 13, 1712. This morning I wrote the following letter to my sister, Mrs. Balderston :

"Dear Sister,

I am longing very much to see you and my brother, and other friends in Edinburgh. At least I would wish to hear from them in these reeling

and perplexing times, wherein a close correspondence, I think, should especially be maintained by prayer and otherwise, among all the true lovers of our Zion. The dragon seems this day to be casting out a flood of wrath and malice against the woman, and the remnant of her seed. All the power and policy of hell is set to work for the ruin and overthrow of the Church of Scotland. The prospect of the sifting storm that seems to be at hand, is like sometimes to stagger and shake me; and makes my spirit to shrink within me. I know not how I shall be able to stand the storm itself, or how I shall do in the swellings of Jordan. Being as yet entirely unacquainted, as to my own experience, with sufferings for the truth and cause of Christ, I am afraid to say with Peter, ‘Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I.’ But this I may say, if he needs my property, my family, my very heart’s blood, to bear witness to his cause and work, I am obliged, though they were ten thousand times more valuable than they are, to lay them all down at his feet, and to follow him, though it were to a Golgotha, or a Calvary. I dare not say that I will do so, lest he let me feel my own weakness in a day of trial. But O I would fain remember my own name Ebenezer, and hope that the Lord will be a help, and that he will be, and do, all for me in the evil day. I would gladly know what our ministers are thinking or doing anent this Oath of Abjuration, which is to be imposed on us; although, through grace, I resolve not to make any man my standard, but my own light my rule in this matter. And, truly, as to any light I have as yet about it, I durst not adventure to take it, though I should be driven with my small family to beg my bread. I hear that the bill for restor-

ing patronages is passed the House of Commons. What a bold stroke is thus given to the fundamental constitution of the Church of Scotland! Every thing from men seems to say they design our ruin; but, I hope, God hath said otherwise, and that he will turn it to good in the issue, to his church.—Remember me to my brother and George, and to my mother, when you see her. Remember me to Jean Rauvit and Barbara Rutherford, not forgetting Janet [Paterson.] I would fain claim a share in your prayers and theirs, that the Lord may keep me honest to his cause, whatever it may cost. This in haste from

Your affectionate brother.”

A few days after the date of this excellent letter, he takes notice of the answers he received, and of their animating influence on his mind.

“*P. April 20, Sabbath.* Before sermon, I received a letter from my mother, and another from my sister Balderston, in answer to that which I wrote, April 13th, which is recorded above;—both very comforting and encouraging to me to stand to the cause and interest of Christ, cost what it will; and both these letters are laid by in the shuttle for letters in my cabinet.”*—“This day,” he adds, “I preached on these words, 2 Kings xix. 4. ‘Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left.’ I preached on it with a view to the private Fast, appointed by the Synod, upon Tuesday next, to encourage and direct myself and flock in the exercises of that day. The Lord was pleased to help in speaking; blessed be his name.”

* We regret that we have never seen either the originals, or copies of these two letters.

Besides his female relatives, there were several other pious women in Edinburgh, whose friendly converse was useful to him, while he, on his part, proved a helper of their joy.—*Janet Paterson* occupied a high place in his esteem. One of his letters to her contains these expressions :

“Dear Friend,

The remembrance of you, especially since the last time I had occasion to converse with you in Edinburgh, has been most savoury to me. I have frequently been made to adore the riches of free grace towards you, and to pray that his grace towards you may abound more and more. As to myself, I dare not say that I am altogether a stranger to the comforts of the Holy Ghost. My dearest Redeemer is now and then giving me a passing visit. I am sometimes even swallowed up with wonder, that he should ever visit the like of me. O help me to praise him, that ever he should have remembered me with such distinguishing love. Forget me not, when it is your privilege to hold him in the galleries.”

In a subsequent entry, he states the following circumstances : Having gone to assist the Rev. Mr. *Grier*, of the College Church, in administering the Lord's Supper, March 4, 1711, he lodged in the same house with this good woman, (being kindly entertained, very probably, under her own roof.) Finding him somewhat depressed in spirit on Sabbath morning, she reminded him of the promise, ‘The meek shall eat and be satisfied,’—adding, that these words had frequently been made sweet to her soul, on his account. Mr. *Grier* preached on that text, ‘My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed ;’ and the first words he read to be sung after ser-

mon, were the same that Janet Paterson had suggested for his encouragement in the morning. This, he says, melted his heart, and called forth ardent wishes that the promise might be accomplished to his soul.

Jean Rauvit, however, possessed, at least, an equal interest in his friendship. He says, accordingly:

“*P. March* 13, 1711. While I was in Edinburgh last, on the Wednesday after the sacrament, Jean Rauvit came to see me in my chamber; and she and I entered on spiritual discourse. She told me that she had been made to have a very savoury remembrance of me several times, about this occasion of the sacrament, both before and after it. She told me what expressions of the Lord’s love she has had, and what nearness she had been admitted to, at this sacrament. O what wonders of free grace and love has the Lord displayed towards her! She is a person of more nearness to God than any that I know. How much of his image is discernible in her! What gravity and solidity! Something of Christ in almost every word she speaks, and a sweet savour of heaven.”

Yet before the close of the same month, he received a letter, informing him that this highly valued person had become exceedingly disconsolate, and complained bitterly of the power of in-dwelling sin. “I was affected,” says he, “when I heard it, and went to pray for her; and this word was sweet to me on her behalf, ‘I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you.’ Her dejection seems to have continued a considerable time; for we find the draught of a consolatory letter addressed to her by this sympathizing minister, more than six months after.

“*P. Nov. 25, 1711. I wrote the following letter to Jean Rawvit :*

“ Dear Friend in our Lord Jesus,

“ Considering the freedom you have sometimes used in communicating your mind to me, with respect to the Lord’s dealings with us, and considering how refreshing I have found our conversation, and how the Lord has sometimes made you to bear me upon your heart before his throne, I cannot but accuse myself of ingratitude, that I have not written to you before this ; and, to tell the truth, I could have no ease in my own mind, until I should write, whether it be to the purpose or not. Unless the Lord make the heart to indite a good matter, neither tongue nor hand can be as the pen of a ready writer. The Lord is my witness, that it is my desire to speak a word in season to you in particular, with whom I have, and am bound to have, a special sympathy. It touches my heart sometimes to the very quick, when I think on your case, as you expressed it to me the last time I was in company with you. O it is terrible and grievous to a loving child, to want his father’s countenance ; or a loving wife, the countenance of her husband, especially such a father and husband as Christ is ; especially when the poor soul looks back to the happy time when it was made to ride in his chariot, embraced in his arms, and dandled on his knees. I know not if the case be the same with you now that it was then. I am at a loss what to say, for want of a more particular correspondence with you. Only I shall tell you this in general for good news, that He who was dead and is alive, and lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and death, is ‘ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; ’ that though he change his car-

riage, yet he doth not change his love. Yea, his love is as ardent, as tender now—rather more so—than when you were embraced in his arms. And besides, he who cannot lie hath said, that he ‘will not contend for ever, neither will he be always wroth, lest the spirit should fail before him, and the soul which he hath made;’ which words were very refreshing lately to me on your behalf, as also those in Psalm ciii. 13, 14. I cannot enlarge at present; only I entreat it as a favour, that you will let me have a line from you, showing me how it is with you, for I have a particular anxiety to hear from you. Remember me to your husband and dear babes. And I rest

Your sympathising friend and servant in glorious
Christ, E. E.”

“I got an answer to this letter,” he adds, in an entry dated Dec. 22, “wherein she told me that what I had written was refreshing to her. However, she remained still under great hiding; and she is many times made to doubt if it ever was so with a saint, as it is with her.”

Amongst the various means of spiritual advancement employed by this good minister of Christ, he did not omit a *careful attention to the language of Providence*. He received with promptitude and humility, the serious lessons inculcated by the lapse of time, the course of events, the vicissitudes which occurred in his own lot, and in the condition of those around him, the signal or unexpected mercies bestowed, and the sharp afflictions that were mingled in his cup. That he was a wise observer of providential occurrences is manifest, in some degree, from the foregoing details; and it will

still more strikingly appear, when his personal and domestic trials fall to be noticed. Let it suffice, meantime, only to introduce two extracts from his Diary, which may serve as an example of the reflections in which he was prepared to indulge at the close of one year, and the commencement of another. The first is as follows :

“ *P. Dec. 30, 1713.* This morning I wakened from sleep a little before six o’clock. I endeavoured to turn my thoughts towards God, and the Lord was pleased to draw by the vail, and give me a glimpse of his glorious perfections. My heart sweetly thawed and warmed. I thirsted and longed for the Lord, and for the enjoyment of him in glory. I rejoiced to think that the time was hastening when this clay tabernacle would be broken, and my soul would mount up above the visible heavens, above the starry heavens, and come to the place where the blessed and glorious Immanuel is entered as my forerunner, and where my soul shall gaze on his glory, and the glory of his Father, with wonder and delight, through all eternity. I am disposed to think that this time is approaching, because the Lord is now and then filling me with such longings after it, and he will satisfy the longing soul ; and by these tastes, these grapes of Eschol, he is loosing and weaning my heart from this world, and preparing me for my journey through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Blessed be the Lord for his great kindness. In the time of this visit, my soul, I remember, was filled with wonder and delight, to think that the eternal Son of God had his eye upon me, and his heart upon me, when he died on the cross ; that God had his eye upon me from eternity, and that the Redeemer had his eye on me in particular, when he rejoiced from eternity in the habitable parts of the earth, when his delights were with the sons

of men ! O what songs of praise shall I have to sing, when I come to heaven ; and how sweetly will I sing them, when I get a well-tuned harp put into my hand, and shall sit down among the spirits of just men made perfect ! O pleasant work ! My soul longs for it, and the time is hastening. Blessed be the Lord."

The second extract referred to, was written eight years after, a few months posterior to the death of his first wife.

" *Anno* 1721, *Jan.* 1, being Sabbath evening. This day I have been about my Master's work. I lectured on Canticles vi. from ver. 4th, ' Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirza, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners.' I designed to have insisted on some of the verses following ; but this one verse took up the whole of the time. And what the Lord helped to say was sweet and savoury ; particularly in answering these five questions from the latter part of the verse ; 1st, Why the church of God is compared to an army ? 2d, Who is the Captain-general of the army ? 3d, Who are the soldiers of the army, and wherein lies their excellency ? 4th, What is the banner ; and why *banners* in the piural ? 5th, What is it that makes the church of God terrible as an army with banners ?—After lecture I preached upon Isaiah xxvi. 19, particularly on the middle part of the verse, ' Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust.' The doctrine I insisted on was, that the resurrection of the saints will be a time of great joy and singing ; where I took occasion to handle these three questions : 1st, Who will be the singers at that day ? 2d, What will be their songs ? 3d, After what manner will they sing ?—The Lord made what was delivered on these heads sweet. He helped to speak, and I hope he refreshed my own soul, and the souls of many of my

hearers. In my first prayer, at the beginning of the work of the day, considering that it was the first day of the year, I took occasion to ask a new year's gift from the Lord; and I hope and desire to believe he has given it, not only by the assistance he gave in public in delivering his message; but this evening, when alone, I was beginning to turn a little melancholy at the thoughts of the want of a dear wife; but Oh! the Lord turned my heart and thoughts towards himself, and begat in me a desire and longing after himself, and the enjoyment of him in heaven; so that I was made to conclude and say, I cannot think but my treasure is in heaven, since my heart is there; for Christ himself, the faithful Witness, says, that 'where the treasure is, there will the heart be also;' and he is my witness, that my principal desire is in heaven. O whom have I in heaven but Him, and there is none in all the earth that I desire besides him. O the Lord be thanked for this new year's day, and new year's visit."

"This same night," he adds, "*January* 1, about 10, I went about secret duty; and O I got a view of Immanuel God-man, in reading his word, John x. from verse 22d to the close. O he is mine and I am his. He is my light, my life, and my all. I love to live in him, and to die in him. I am going to sleep, and I desire to sleep in Jesus; and when I die, I desire to die in Jesus; and I believe and am persuaded that I shall be for ever with Jesus, because I cannot be without him, and he will not be without me. No, no; he will bring me to himself, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. This has been a pleasant new year's day to me. O let it be thus with me through the whole year.

Of the numerous expedients for promoting his own spiritual improvement, to which this godly minister resorted, the last we shall notice here is *the writing of a Diary*. This is a practice which it would be obviously wrong to inculcate strenuously on all Christians. Thousands have not the education or capacity which it requires. Many to whom it might not be otherwise impracticable, are so situated in providence, that they cannot command the necessary leisure. In some instances it has been performed in so unguarded a manner, or such injudicious uses have been made of the record by surviving relatives or friends, that among all who felt an interest either in the posthumous reputation of the parties, or in the advancement of practical religion, it has excited only sentiments of sincere regret. Owing to the profound treachery and depravity of the human heart, the keeping of a diary, it has been alleged, has sometimes manifestly originated in a legal or in an ostentatious temper, and has merely supplied fuel for spiritual pride. The idea that the record will sooner or later meet the eyes of men, and recommend the writer to their esteem and admiration as a person of eminent piety, is apt at least to mingle itself with purer views, and even unconsciously to exercise a considerable influence on the statements made, and the expressions employed. These and similar considerations have determined some of the most excellent ministers and private Christians to forbear the practice in question. With whatever vigilance they may have inwardly regarded the Lord's procedure towards them, and the varied workings of their own hearts, and with whatever zeal and activity they have aspired after proficiency in the divine life, it has been their decided pur-

pose to record little or nothing on such subjects. Others, after writing a diary for years, have committed the whole, or the greater part of it, to the flames. In some cases, good men, on the verge of eternity, have been induced by a sense of duty, or by the importunity of friends, to prepare a succinct narrative of their life and experience, for the satisfaction and benefit of a private circle, if not for the advantage of the religious public.

The published journals of some exemplary Christians, it must be admitted, have been so judiciously written, and have proved so highly useful for the direction and encouragement of others in the service of God, that it is cause of lively gratitude to the author of all good, that ever they existed, and that they were ever given to the world. Who will say that it is wrong in any Christian, possessing the requisite ability and leisure, provided he observe the dictates of modesty and prudence in his manner of proceeding, and strive, in dependence on divine grace, to be actuated only by pious and honourable motives,—to record from time to time a few notices of what is most material in his own experience? The review of such memorandums, after months and years have passed away, may call to his recollection facts in his history, important to himself, which, without such help, he would have utterly forgotten; and may serve not only to awaken fresh sentiments of humility and gratitude, but to incite to renewed ardour and circumspection in the path of righteousness.

To ministers of the Gospel, whose official character obliges them to bestow much attention on the spiritual interests of others, the keeping of a diary has been recommended as an excellent means of preventing them

from overlooking their own. In some circumstances, too, without question, it is particularly natural for them to adopt this expedient. After the momentous change of views and feelings undergone by the minister of Portmoak, it is not wonderful that he thought of writing the manuscript to which he gives the title of *MY OWN EXPERIENCES OF THE LORD'S DEALINGS*. It is possible, however, that he had recourse to this measure, in consequence of the suggestion of a friend. It is stated by Mr. Boston, that for the space of fourteen months in 1698-9, he kept a large diary, "moved thereto by converse with Mr. Mair."* The same pious minister may very probably have recommended this exercise also to Ebenezer Erskine, whose confidential intercourse with Mr. Mair, formerly adverted to, commenced some time before the date of the first entry in the diary. From some expressions which occur in this record of his experience, it appears that he was induced to write it by a wish to preserve in his own bosom a grateful remembrance of what God had done for his soul, and to animate himself to increased vigilance and activity in the prosecution of the Christian race. In all probability it was intended to be strictly private. Possibly he never thought even of its falling under the eye of any relative or friend. With the exception of an occasional word or two, it is written entirely in short-hand characters, according to a rude and antiquated system of stenography, and these *very closely* put together. The whole is comprised in fifty-three large pages.

With regard to the time and manner of keeping

* *Memoirs*, p. 45.

this record, he seems to have neither formed nor observed any fixed plan. It extends from November 22d 1707 to 1728, or rather to 1722; since after that year there are but few entries,—for each of the years 1726, 1727, 1728 only a few lines,—for 1725 not one syllable. Even at those periods during which he attended most unremittingly to this register, he did not write in it every day, or every week, or even every month. The details present a great diversity in this respect, corresponding to the degree of his leisure, or rather to the excitement he felt, and to the interesting nature of the events in which he was concerned. Owing, for example, to the numerous afflictions and bereavements which occurred in his family during the years 1713, 1714, and 1720, what he wrote in the course of these three years amounts to somewhat more than one half of the whole manuscript.

That he never resumed the writing of a diary after 1728, though to us not absolutely certain, appears highly probable. In the volume containing the record of which we have just given an account, the last entry for 1728 is succeeded by a number of blank pages; and amongst the numerous other note-books of his we have seen, no decisive trace of its renewal can be discovered. For what reasons he discontinued this private narrative, it is unnecessary largely to inquire. Neither candour nor justice will ever allege that it was owing to the decay of vital religion in his heart. His subsequent history, whatever faults or imperfections may be discoverable in it, gave evidence that both in a private and in a public capacity, he continued, on the whole, to shine with growing lustre, and to go forward with increasing strength, till at last his earthly career was brought to a

most happy and triumphant termination. Many distinguished followers of Christ, after keeping a journal of their experiences for a number of years, have found it necessary to abridge the labour, or entirely to relinquish the work. The extent to which their diaries have swelled, and the consequent difficulty of consulting them with profit, have deterred them from adding to their bulk ; or other avocations, occurring to occupy their time, have caused them to desist. Mr. Erskine, in the latter part of his life and ministry, had a multitude of active duties to employ his time and attention. Nor must it be omitted, that though for some years after he became acquainted with the power of the truth, he appears, as we have formerly stated, to have attached an undue weight to his varying frames and feelings, he ultimately saw it to be at once his duty and his interest to pore less on the fluctuations of his own experience, and to fix his mind more directly and steadily on the great truths and promises exhibited to him in the Gospel. This is expressly mentioned by himself as in part the reason of omitting to record his experiences as he had formerly done ; while he humbly takes shame to himself for not sufficiently regarding and improving the Lord's dispensations. " I have entirely omitted," says he, June 21, 1726, " to write any thing that happened to me almost these two years and a half, although much of the Lord's goodness I might have marked, if I had duly observed either his works of providence towards me and mine, or his operations of grace in me. Only in general, I think, the Lord has for some time been teaching me to *live rather by faith than by sense*, though sense has not been altogether wanting. Many, many sweet views of the Lord Jesus has he granted

me ; many down-castings and many upliftings, which I have forgot.”

How far he did right either in commencing and keeping up for a time, or in at last breaking off his journal ; in what degree the record may have answered valuable purposes in his own experience ; and what advantages are likely to arise to others from this publication of many of its most interesting passages—it is now left to the judgment of the candid and intelligent reader to decide. Every minister, and every Christian, must also judge for himself, whether or not it becomes him in duty, or as a matter of expedience, to imitate this and other individuals, who, to a greater or less extent, have, by their example, countenanced the practice of faithfully recording, as in the presence of God, their religious exercises and enjoyments, defects and attainments. With respect to this, as well as many other points, in which different sentiments and modes prevail among truly good men, the apostolic rule should be strictly observed—“ Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not ; and let not him who eateth not judge him that eateth, for God hath received him.—Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” Rom. xiv. 3, 5.

CHAPTER IV.

Active discharge of the pastoral office—Preparation for the pulpit—Subjects of discourse—Utterance—Frequent preaching—Catechising—Visitation of families—Attention to the sick—Instruction of the young—Praying societies—Various advantages at Portmoak—Success of Mr. Erskine's ministry at home and abroad—Correspondents.

GENUINE principle, deeply rooted in the heart, cannot fail to govern the practice; and the real Christian, whatever be his appointed sphere, is justly expected to diffuse around him a salutary influence. The strong and fervid language in which the subject of this memoir expresses his devotional feelings, in the private record of his religious experience, was amply justified by the whole tenor of his conduct; and the detail of his labours in the ministry will show that he discharged this sacred office with a corresponding fidelity and ardour. We make this remark in reference to his manner of conducting himself, subsequently to the happy revolution which took place in his sentiments and feelings.

Even prior to that event, he appears to have been generally regarded as a pious and faithful clergyman. Certainly, however, there must have been then a lack of holy activity and zeal; and his discourses were confessedly deficient in evangelical light and savour. Although, as his earliest note-books demonstrate, he by

no means avoided texts that relate immediately to the distinguishing tenets of Scripture, he seems to have presented to his hearers a confused "mixture of legal and evangelical doctrine," not uncommon among the clergy of that age.* But the blessed change he experienced in his soul produced the most desirable effects on his studies, his preaching, and every part of his ministry.

His reading was chiefly theological. Turretine, Witsius, Dr. Owen, Bishop Beveridge, Charnock, and Flavel, were among the number of his favourite authors. We have seen, however, that he perused the Book of God with peculiar and unceasing delight, and drew copious supplies directly from this pure and inexhaustible fountain. In his preparations for the pulpit, he exercised indefatigable diligence; but his studies were sanctified and sweetened by meditation and prayer. The toil of writing and of committing to memory was intermitted, and succeeded, by short ejaculations, or solemn addresses to the throne of grace. The evening of Saturday, in particular, found him thus exercised. Let us hear what is noted on this point.

"*Dec. 26, 1713, betwixt 4 and 5, P. M. being Saturday.* After I had ended the writing of my sermon, and read it once over, I went to prayer to beg the Lord's help and assistance in all, and in the several parts, of my studies; and I found my soul drawn out to the Lord, choosing him as my alone portion and heritage. I thought my soul grounded itself anew upon the satisfaction and mediation of the glorious and ever-blessed

* Brown's Gospel-Truth, p. 83. 1st ed.

Redeemer. Here do I rest ; here do I venture my soul for time and eternity."

"*June 12, 1714*, being Saturday, at 11 of the night. I had a sweet visit this night in secret prayer. I found the Lord sensibly with me, enlarging and drawing out my soul to himself. I saw him as a God incarnate, manifested in my own nature. I found my soul closing with him. I could say, My God is become bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh ; my God is my elder brother, my husband, and Redeemer. O I saw his valuable blood. I saw him dying on a cross and obeying the law ; and so rolled my soul on this blessed foundation. O that I may be helped to commend him, and to win souls to his obedience to-morrow ! And O that for this purpose he may be a tongue and a mouth unto me, and give me the tongue of the learned."

His desire and resolution to make the blessed Redeemer, in his person, offices, righteousness and grace, the grand theme of his discourses, are often expressed in emphatical and interesting terms.

"*Feb. 5, 1717*. The Lord was pleased to give me a visit, after much darkness and guilt had been surrounding me. I saw all wrong in myself ; but glory to God, I see all right in the Surety. I see that he is all in all, and that there is no relief for a poor soul but only in Christ. Oh I see that he is the *marrow* of all religion, and that a whole eternity shall be spent by the redeemed in singing his praises that loved us, and gave himself for us. A glimpse of him, I find, is like life from the dead. O that I were enabled to retain this lively sense of his love and grace, when I go about my ministerial work, It would help to commend him to souls."

“*Dec. 19, 1717.* This night, in secret prayer, I got a sweet view of Christ as the *up-making all* of my soul. I was made to cry out, O Lord, I am well-pleased with him in whom thy soul delighteth; and to cry, O Lord, I bless thee that ever made him precious to my soul. Once I was without Christ, knew not his excellence, and saw no form nor comeliness in him, why he should be desired; but now he is to me the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. He is the very darling of my heart. I see him to be ‘the end of the law,’ and the all of the Gospel; and I would be content to have the clay tabernacle dissolved, that I might be for ever with him. O that while I am in this world, I may be made useful to proclaim his excellency and glory to others. This is the great desire and ambition of my soul, and that which I desire to aim and level at in all my ministerial work—to commend Him to immortal souls.”

While he took heart-felt pleasure in preparing and delivering evangelical discourses, he was truly and humbly grateful for every token of the divine presence, aid, and blessing.

“*June 26, 1717.* I have been in a weary condition this long time past. My hope and strength were quite perished, and every thing good has been out of my sight. But I have been some better since Kinglassie sacrament, Sabbath was eight days; and two or three days ago I was a little revived with the words of the angel to the shepherds, ‘I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.’ This text of Scripture I fixed upon on Monday last, as the subject I would preach upon Sabbath next at Largo

sacrament, and O I have found it sweet; I have got some heart-lightening views of the Lord Jesus in studying this subject, particularly this same day, being Wednesday. While I was writing, the Lord was pleased to give such a view of Christ as made my heart to melt, and tears of joy to break in mine eyes, and my hand to hold still, and my tongue to praise. Glory to the Lord for this visit. I hope it is an earnest of more, and that he will be with me in proclaiming the glad news of a Saviour to his people at Largo, Sabbath next. Amen."

"Nov. 24, 1720, being a fast-day. I bless the Lord who aided me in the work of this day, notwithstanding of bodily indisposition, and disappointment as to assistance, which I was expecting from three several quarters. The Lord helped to speak and deliver his message with some measure of liberty from Hos. iv. 1, 2. It is the desire of my soul, not to please men, but to please God, my blessed Master, whom I desire to serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son."

To these passages from the Diary may be added an extract of a letter written at Kirkaldy, addressed to a Christian friend, and expressing similar sentiments of gratitude to his divine Master. We have found a copy of the letter in a Note-book, begun about the year 1723.

"I came to this place on Wednesday, in order to attend the Presbytery, and thought to have returned yesterday with Mr. Currie; but friends here, particularly Mrs. *Kay*, Mrs. *Sibbald*, and others, constrained me to stay this last night, in order to give them an exhortation; which, accordingly, I did, yesternight, to a goodly company. And though it was against my inclination that I stayed, yet I find that my staying has been of the

Lord ; for I find some souls were edified and comforted. And O I think it but a small thing for men to spend their lungs in the cause of souls, for which Christ spent the blood of his heart. I think it is my desire, in every place where providence casts me, to send forth the savour of that name, which is as ointment poured forth ; and I look on it as my crown, my glory, and my joy, when he helps me, in any measure, to commend him unto souls. Oh pray for me, that I may be honoured and helped to make his praise glorious ; for it is the greatest credit ever a poor creature came to, to be a trumpet to send forth the joyful sound of life, liberty, and salvation, through him."

Though, with the Apostle Paul, he determined to know nothing amongst his hearers, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified, he justly considered this determination as involving a firm purpose to explain and enforce that holiness of heart and life, which flows from faith in the cross ; and to reprove those works of darkness, which it is the design of the Gospel to destroy. We learn, accordingly, from his Note-books, that he delivered a series of discourses on the Shorter Catechism, including an exposition of the ten commandments. How deeply he felt his obligation to bear a faithful testimony against sin in all its forms, and how sincerely he deplored every appearance of remissness on his own part, in giving necessary warning and reproof to transgressors, is manifest from the two following entries ; the one of which relates to the irreverent use of God's name, and the other to the profanation of the Sabbath.

" *Monday, Jan. 29, 1712.* I remember there was a thought which occurred to me yesterday, anent zeal in a minister of the Gospel in reproofing sin, and it was

this: A minister is the ambassador of the Lord Christ, the Prince of peace, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. If the ambassador of an earthly prince or potentate should hear or see any indignity spoken or done against his master's interest, whose commission he bears, would he not resent it? If he did not, he were unworthy of his trust; and if his master should hear of it, he would surely punish him, and never commit such a trust to him again. Now, every sin is an affront offered to the Lord Christ; it is an indignity offered to the crown of heaven,—particularly, swearing by the name of God, or a slight using of his name, in common discourse. And shall his ambassadors be silent when they hear their Master affronted? Shall they be so dastardly-spirited, so cowardly, as not to espouse their Master's cause and quarrel? Shall they sit silent, when they hear his glorious name abused and profaned by the black mouths of graceless sinners? O Lord, I am a poor faint-hearted creature; inspire me with courage and boldness for thee, lest I deny thee by silence before men, and thou shouldst deny me before thy Father, and before the holy angels."

"*Friday, Feb. 25, 1715.* Just now, sitting in my closet, it pleased the Lord to give me a sharp challenge for my silence in not leaving a testimony against the profanation of God's day, which happened some while ago in —— house, by the master of ——, and the laird of ——, by drinking there till after the time of divine worship in the forenoon. I remember I spoke of it to —— himself, and challenged him anent keeping an open house in the time of public worship on the Lord's day, and told him of the great scandal which it had occasioned through the country. But my heart smote

me, that seeing the thing had occasioned a public offence, I had not given a public testimony against it ; and, therefore, I resolve, if the Lord will, the next time that I preach in public in my own congregation, (for I am next Sabbath to preach at Leslie,) to enter upon it, having a fair occasion to introduce it, by the reading of the King's Proclamation against Profanity. The Lord help me to manage my work with zeal and prudence ; and, Lord, forgive me for my slackness in reproving sin."

In another part of his Diary, he complains of his "natural faintness and pusillanimity." But whatever constitutional timidity and self-diffidence he may have felt, and whatever cause he once had to accuse himself of a criminal fear of man, he was ultimately enabled, both in the public and private duties of his office, to discover an uncommon fidelity and boldness in pleading the cause of God and truth. Shortly after his heart received its first powerful impressions of evangelical and vital religion, his hearers observed, with pleasure, a very great improvement even in his manner of pronouncing his discourses. Formerly, he was subject to considerable embarrassment in public speaking, and found himself apt to lose the command of his ideas, unless he kept his eyes steadily fixed on a particular stone of the wall opposite to the pulpit ; but now he spoke with the calm composure and unfettered energy becoming an ambassador of Christ ; was fully master of his mind and voice ; looked round on his audience with a dignified, yet sweet and engaging aspect, and commanded a deep and universal attention.* That fervent

* Portmoak MS.

love to the Saviour, which now glowed in his heart, repressed the power of unmanly cowardice, and inspired him with a new and most impressive eloquence. One of his manuscripts contains the following Latin distich, which he probably recorded, as applicable to the mingled feelings of which he was conscious,—being “held back by fear, yet urged on by love.”

Dat mihi fræna timor,
Dat mihi calcar amor.

It was usual for the Scotch clergy of that age to deliver, at least in the summer season, a lecture and a sermon in the forenoon, with another sermon in the afternoon. In addition to these services, Mr. Erskine, agreeably to the practice of many of his brethren, established a weekly lecture on the Thursday.

For some time after his ordination, the Lord's Supper was but rarely administered—only thrice in the space of seven years. Owing to a variety of causes, similar infrequency in the observance of this solemn institution was very common in Scotland, particularly in country parishes, in those days. Subsequently, however, he appears to have adopted the practice of its annual celebration. The lively interest he felt in this ordinance, whether he took part in its services at Portmoak or elsewhere, was formerly shown from his own memorandums.

Days set apart for public Thanksgiving and Fasting were devoutly observed. In an entry, dated Aug. 26, 1708, he briefly alludes to a day of Thanksgiving. After recording the impressions he then felt of the deceitfulness and the destructive tendency of sin, and of the Saviour's excellence, he adds, “When I awoke the next

morning, being a Thanksgiving, the first text that occurred to me was, ‘O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord.’ ”

To Fasts appointed by royal authority, and by the Synod of Fife, he makes repeated allusions. A passage formerly quoted from his Diary refers to a private Fast appointed by the Synod in April 1712, when the law of patronage was revived. The government having ordained a Fast to be held on March 29, 1710, that prayers might be offered up for success to the arms of her majesty Queen Anne and her allies, his Presbytery called on the congregations under their inspection to observe that appointment ; and to mourn over the sins of the land, which had procured spiritual plagues, as well as the calamities of war, the decay of trade, and the dearth of provisions. On this national Fast, he preached at Portmoak from Jer. iv. 14. “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness.” On a Synodical Fast, Feb. 24, 1714, we find him giving evidence, by the exercises of the closet in the evening, of the sincerity with which he concurred with others in acts of self-abasement and penitence ; lamenting the dulness of his frame in conducting the public worship ; yet refreshed with the consolations prepared for mourners in Zion.

While he served God with zeal and alacrity in the various ministrations of the pulpit, both stated and occasional, he was equally attentive to other pastoral duties ; as public catechising, ministerial visitation of families, and visiting the sick.*

* See Notices of a Presbyterial Visitation of the Parish in 1710. App. No. VI.

CATECHISING is an exercise particularly urged in the formularies of the Church of Scotland; and the days have been when a great proportion of her clergy faithfully performed it. When rightly conducted, it is, perhaps, of all ministerial labours, the most instructive; and whether the general neglect of it in the establishment, and the desuetude into which it seems to be rapidly falling amongst the dissenters, be owing chiefly to the remissness of the ministers, or to the indifference and fastidiousness of the people, the abandonment or decay of this ancient Presbyterian practice is much to be regretted. The man of piety and influence, who shall, with effective wisdom and energy, set his hand to the revival of this excellent and useful institution, will do an important service to Zion, and receive the cordial thanks of her genuine friends.—This good minister of Portmoak, when holding diets of catechising, often conversed with his people on what they had heard on Sabbath, that the truths delivered might, by means of familiar repetition, make the more lasting impressions on their memories and hearts. To awaken and rivet the attention of the whole congregation on the Lord's day, he sometimes would intimate at the beginning of his sermon, that he intended to examine on the subject of it, that same week; but deferred specifying the particular quarter where the diet of examination was to take place, till the congregation were about to be dismissed.*

In the VISITATION OF FAMILIES he discovered much gravity and dignity, mingled with ardent love to the souls of his people. His general demeanour, though

* Portmoak MS.

prudent and becoming, was by no means forbidding and austere. On the contrary, when walking for necessary recreation through the bounds of his parish, he often made short friendly calls at the houses of his parishioners; expressed his happiness at finding them well; partook, without ceremony, of a homely repast; and recommended religion by his lively and entertaining, as well as instructive conversation. But when he made a ministerial visit, he deemed it right to lay aside, in some degree, his usual vivacity, and to guard against those innocent pleasantries in which at other times he was apt to indulge. Assuming all that solemnity of appearance and deportment which characterized him on the most sacred occasions, he generally introduced himself with the words that our Lord directed his disciples to use when they entered any habitation, "Peace be to this house." He commonly proposed a few practical questions to each adult, then examined and encouraged the children, and after an appropriate word of exhortation, concluded with a very particular and affectionate prayer.*

It appears from his diary that, in the morning of a day of visitation, he was accustomed solemnly to implore the divine assistance in the work; and that when favoured with "the opening of the lips" in this private exercise, he was no less grateful to his Master than after he had experienced his gracious aid in the most public ministrations.

"*Wednesday, January 19, 1708.* I was made to plead the promise that he would, by the spirit of truth, lead me into all truth, and that he would go along with

* Portmoak MS.

me this day, and help me to a faithful discharge of that part of ministerial work that I was going about in the ground of *Arnot*, namely, visiting; that he would help me to a solid impression of God upon my spirit, and of the great worth of precious souls, and direct me to speak a word suitable to the case of the people.”

“ *Tuesday, November 2, 1714.* I have been abroad all this day visiting my congregation. Blessed be his name that gave me assistance. After I returned home, and also by the way, I got some soul-humbling, soul-refreshing views of the majesty of the Lord in the works of creation. When I beheld such a glorious and beautiful fabric as the heavens and the luminaries thereof, I could not but admire the Maker. My soul acquiesced in him as a complete and every way adequate portion to my rational soul. And O I could not but adore his condescension in taking on the nature of man——.”

VISITING THE SICK was another exercise in which he discovered the same diligence, wisdom, and affection. He stood prepared alike to sound a necessary alarm in the ears of the thoughtless sinner overtaken by affliction, and to speak words in season for the consolation of the dejected Christian. The following anecdote has been considered worthy of remembrance. When visiting *Ann Meiglo*, a poor but godly woman, she thus addressed him: “ O Sir, I am just lying here, a poor useless creature.” “ Think you so ?” was his reply. “ I think,” added she, “ what is true, Sir, that if I were away to heaven, I would be of some use to glorify God without sin.” “ Indeed Ann,” the good man kindly answered, “ I think you are glorifying God here by your resignation and submission to his will, and that in

the face of many difficulties, and under many distresses. In heaven the saints have not your burdens to groan under: your praise, burdened as you are, is more wonderful to me, and, I hope, acceptable to God.”*

In this interesting branch of pastoral duty he often experienced a sensible enlargement of heart, which supplied new ground of thankfulness and praise.

“*January 26, 1715, between 7 and 8 P.M.* This day I have been abroad visiting the sick, and have surrounded the Loch [Leven]. I bless the Lord who has preserved me from fatal accidents, which might have carried me into eternity, and that I have found my habitation in peace. I cannot say that I have had much of his sensible presence this day—only some faint glimpses of the Lord, as it were, through a thick veil. But I am persuaded he is not far off; for I have found, for the most part of the day, as I was travelling alone, and especially at this present time, I find a breathing and languor of soul after Christ.”

“*April 24, 1722.* This day, when I was visiting a sick man in *Broombrae, Alexander Glass*, the Lord was pleased, in my converse with this man, to loose my heart and my tongue together, and to enable me to speak to the commendation of Christ, and to open up the way of salvation to the poor man. My tongue was like the pen of a ready writer, when I spoke of the things touching the King, in so much that I said to the poor man; ‘Alexander, I do not know what may be in it, but the Lord has helped me to speak to you with liberty and freedom of soul; I wish that the Lord may make use of these words he has directed me to speak,

* Brown’s Gospel-Truth, p. 46.

and lay them home to your soul.' I had liberty also in praying with the poor man ——."

Aware of the vast importance of early impressions, he was at great pains in promoting the spiritual welfare of the YOUNG. Not satisfied with addressing them particularly in the houses of their parents in the usual course of visitation, he superintended their education in the parish school. The parochial schools of Scotland, so highly and so justly celebrated for their salutary tendency and extensive usefulness, were originally intended to be seminaries, no less of religious instruction, than of the first principles of learning. Besides the daily reading of the Scriptures, and repetition of questions of the Catechism, it was the common practice with the teachers—and we hope the custom is still in some degree kept up—to devote a great proportion of the time on Saturday, to examination and exhortation, on topics of religion and morality. In such exercises the teachers generally received, less or more, the countenance and aid of the minister. Mr. Erskine, accordingly, very often visited the school of Portmoak on the Saturday, and after examining the scholars, exhorted and prayed with them. Sometimes, instead of going to the school, he invited the children to come to him in the manse, to which they repaired with uncommon alacrity; knowing that their minister never treated them with greater kindness, nor recommended the paths of wisdom to their choice in more endearing and animating terms, than when he met them in his own house.

Another means which he employed for promoting vital religion in his parish, was the establishment of

PRAYING SOCIETIES. Such institutions, it is allowed, have in some instances, owing to the operation of a litigious and censorious spirit, become a hinderance rather than a help to genuine piety. Thousands, however, can from happy experience attest, that, when properly conducted, they are signally conducive to spiritual improvement. A pious and prudent minister may do much to secure the utility of these Societies, and to obviate the abuses to which they are liable. Mr. Erskine considered it his duty to give them his countenance. In the year 1714, he composed a set of rules for their direction, which all the members were expected to subscribe and to observe;* and he continued to assist and cheer them by his presence, from time to time, as often as his other avocations would permit. The benign influence of these social and humble institutions, thus judiciously established and conducted, appeared in the exemplary lives and triumphant deaths of many of their members.

In the varied labours of his ministry, this diligent pastor was highly encouraged, by perceiving the value that was put on them, and the success with which they were crowned. Knowing the worth of immortal souls, it rejoiced him exceedingly to find his ministrations blessed, in any one instance, for bringing a sinner to the knowledge of Christ, or for promoting the holiness and joy of a Christian. Of this we may produce the following example :

Portmoak, Jan. 19, 1709, being Wednesday, and a sermon-day. Margaret Selkirk stayed with me to din-

* See App. No. VII.

ner ; and after dinner, she came up to my closet, and told me how the Lord had made me an instrument of refreshing her soul with the sweet truths of God. She told me of the way and manner, and means of her conversion ; and what wonderful mercy and free grace had been shown towards her. And O with what life did she speak of the Lord's dealings to her soul. After this I told her of my condition, and how much I was a stranger to the sweet manifestations of the Lord's face ; and I entreated her to carry my case to the Lord, that he might be graciously pleased to return to me. She promised to do it ; and, praise to my God, this morning, being Thursday, Jan. 20, in prayer, I found a *blink* of his countenance ; I found his spirit warming my heart ; and drawing out and enlarging my soul after him. I was made to pray for myself, that God would honour me to be an instrument to serve him in this congregation. I was made to bless him that he honoured me as an instrument in comforting and establishing the souls of any of his people that were near and dear to him. I was made to bless God, for his grace towards *M. Selkirk* in particular, in whom I saw so much of God and heaven. I was made to bless God for hearing her on my account, and to plead that he might hear her for myself, for my flock, for my family ; and that he would hear both her and me, for the Lord Christ's sake."

This extract from the Diary, expressed as it is with that plainness and simplicity of diction which characterises the whole manuscript, and which accorded with the prevailing taste and spirit of the pious in those times, supplies a pleasing specimen of the high esteem he placed on the prayers of the godly amongst his people as the means of obtaining divine communications to

himself. The following entry exhibits another proof of the delight which he felt at every appearance of success in gaining the attention of an audience to the doctrines of the cross, or in impressing the conscience and heart. His gratitude and joy were enhanced by the disheartening thoughts which had previously oppressed his mind.

“ *July 7, 1714*, being the Sabbath immediately before the Sacrament in this place. I was under great fears as to my through-bearing in the work of this day, before I went forth to public worship ; which I remember put me to my knees, and made me pray that if the Lord did not go with me, he would rather lay his hand upon me, and put a stop to my going further, to discredit the Gospel. The Lord was pleased graciously to hear and pity ; for I never remember that I had more freedom in my life than this day, in delivering my Master’s message. There was a great company of people, so that I was obliged to preach in the open field, in regard that the church could not contain the half of them. The Lord gave me a composure of mind, and suggested many things to me in speaking, which I had not so much as thought on before. The people heard with a great deal of greediness and attention, so as if they would have drawn the word out of me ; and I cannot but think some souls have this day been either converted, or confirmed and comforted. I have heard, since sermon was over, that some were made to go home with vehement longings after Christ. I preached on Isaiah xlii. 1 ; the second doctrine drawn from the connexion, viz. that the gracious discovery of Christ darkens all the pretended excellency of idols. I went to see some sick folk ; and one *David Wilkie*, a very judicious per-

son, told me that his daughter *Margaret* was made to go home with a strange work upon her spirit, as if a flame of love and desire after Christ had been kindled in her breast. Lord make it to abide, and to burn more and more. I take the Lord's countenance in this day's work as a seal of my ministry, and a pledge of his being with me on the great Feast-day.

The readiness of his parishioners to appreciate and to profit by his services, appears not merely from his own private record, but from other documents, and from unquestioned tradition. Not only was the church crowded on the Lord's day, but the Thursday lecture was well attended. Masters and servants studied mutually to arrange their affairs, so that neither the opportunity of public worship, nor the necessary business of their secular callings, was neglected. Even diets of examination were often attended by a large audience. The people distinguished themselves alike by their thirst for knowledge, by a spirit of devotion, and by the propriety of their general conduct. During the time of public prayer and praise, the hearts of the worshippers seemed much engaged. The services of the Sabbath were frequently closed by singing the concluding verses of the 72d Psalm. And "O!" added a pious eye and ear-witness, when relating this circumstance, "with what rapture was it sung! Never can I hear such delightful melody, till I get to heaven."

One mark of the attention to religious instruction which, during that period, prevailed among the people of Portmoak, was the habit of taking notes, in shorthand, of the discourses, at the time of their delivery. With regard to the propriety of this practice, different opinions may be held. It was not discouraged, how-

ever, by Mr. Erskine. Sometimes he publicly addressed the “ scribes ” as he called them, and gave them short hints for their direction. Some of them became so expert in the art, that they wrote the discourses entire ; while others satisfied themselves with taking the heads and leading ideas. Not contented with writing lectures, and sermons, and exhortations at the Lord’s Supper, many of them recorded the substance of the catechetical exercises, and even private counsels addressed to families and individuals. So profound was their veneration for their pastor, and so great their esteem for his instructions, that they were solicitous to preserve whatever dropt from his tongue or pen. Some of the writers were accustomed to read over, on the Sabbath evenings, the discourses of the day, to their relatives and neighbours, who gladly embraced this opportunity of refreshing their memories. Manuscript volumes, containing the sermons and other exercises of that age, are still in the possession of several individuals in the parish. Amongst the most noted shorthand “ scribes,” was one *Ebenezer Birrel*, said to have been the first male-child baptized by Mr. Erskine, and the first interred in the present church-yard of Portmoak. He departed this life in 1722, in the 21st year of his age. His minister esteemed him sincerely while he lived, and after his death composed the following plain verse, which was inscribed on his tomb :

“ My weary life is spent,
My glass is run ;
My torch is lighted,
Now my joy’s begun.”

A variety of circumstances happily combined to give effect to Mr. Erskine’s ministry in this parish. A foun-

dation for his usefulness was probably laid by the powerful discourses of the persecuted ministers, particularly Messrs. BLACKADER and WELSH, who during the unhappy reigns of the two brothers, preached occasionally to large and deeply interested audiences in the most sequestered spots of the Lomond hills. The morals of the people too had been considerably reformed by the laudable exertions of his worthy predecessors, the Rev. WILLIAM MACKIE, a man of eminent ability, who succeeded the episcopal clergyman at the Revolution 1688, and was afterward translated to the parish of Markinch,* and the Rev. JOHN WILSON, who was ordained at Portmoak in November 24, 1698, but transferred to Kirkaldy, as was formerly stated, † in the year 1702. The subject of this memoir zealously seconded the labours of those good men; and not without remarkable success, used every effort, by seasonable warnings, and by the faithful exercise of discipline, to promote reverence for the name, the Sabbath, and the ordinances of God, and universal decency and regularity of conduct.

In the preservation of order and decorum in the parish, he was greatly assisted by the vigilance and prudent activity of his ELDERS, of whom, for a considerable period, the number was no less than twenty-four. Distinguished for piety and good sense, they exerted themselves with much effect in composing differences, in cherishing a spirit of love and concord, in securing a punctual attendance on every part of divine worship; in short, in furthering all the important objects of their office. Some of these venerable men lived to a great

* See Append. No. VIII.

† Page 72.

age ; and to the present hour their names are remembered, and their memory is blessed. To animate this valuable class of coadjutors to an active discharge of their office, their pastor composed a paper for their use, entitled, “ Instructions to the Elders of Portmoak.” He prepared also a series of Questions relating to the performance of their official duties, which was approved by the session, and appointed to be proposed at least twice a year to each elder. *

Another favourable circumstance was the co-operation of excellent TEACHERS, who during his incumbency, occupied the parish school of Portmoak ; particularly Mr. DUN, an able and a pious man, who was settled schoolmaster here in the year 1722, and continued to fulfil the duties of his station for the long period of fifty years. To the instructions of this excellent preceptor, a number of clergymen, and others that have risen to eminence, were indebted for the first principles of literature. He could number among his pupils, for example, Mr. JOHN MAIR, A. M. Rector of the Grammar School of Ayr, and afterwards of the Perth Academy, whose elementary works, as his Tyro’s Dictionary, and his Introduction to Latin Syntax, are still in high repute for their utility to the students of that language. MICHAEL BRUCE, the celebrated poet, formerly mentioned, was another of Mr. Dun’s scholars. After acquiring the elements of knowledge under this gentleman’s tuition, he prosecuted his classical and philosophical studies at the university of St. Andrews, and subsequently in spring 1767, attended the prelections of the late Rev. John Swanston of Kin-

* These Questions may be seen in the Append. No. IX.

ross, professor of theology to the Associate Synod. By his talents and modesty he endeared himself to Mr. Swanston, and also to the late Rev. Dr. Lawson of Selkirk, Mr. James Scott, Musselburgh, and other fellow students, who spoke warmly of his rare endowments, and deeply lamented his early decease. His connexion with the Secession church has been generally passed over by his biographers. Every one, however, has heard of his intimacy with Logan, a man of kindred genius, who was the first editor of his works, and who did not hesitate to affirm, that the latter part of his *Elegy on Spring*, "is perhaps not inferior to any poetry in any language." The church yard of Portmoak now presents to the delighted eye of the passenger, an elegant sepulchral monument to the memory of this admirable youth; which was reared a few years since, chiefly by the benevolent efforts of Dr. George Baird, Principal of the University of Edinburgh.

The last of Mr. Dun's pupils we shall notice is Mr. DAVID ARNOT of Portmoak, an individual who, though he never aspired to the honours of any public station, was well known by a wide circle of acquaintance, as a man of excellent sense and superior worth. This is the friend whom, under the designation of *AGRICOLA*, Bruce has immortalized, in his poem entitled "*Loch Leven*." The eulogy, which consists of twenty lines, begins as follows :

"How blest the man ! who in these peaceful plains
Ploughs his paternal field, far from the noise,
The care, and bustle of a busy world !" &c.

The parish of Portmoak, possessing an excellent gospel ministry, and these various concurring advantages,

became like “ a field which the Lord hath blessed.” It abounded with intelligent and lively Christians, and exhibited to all observers a happy specimen of the salutary fruit which arises from the divine blessing on the labours of a faithful pastor, aided by judicious elders, and by competent and diligent teachers. It may be affirmed, without flattery, that to the present day, the inhabitants of that parish, generally speaking, are superior to many with respect to their attainments in Christian knowledge, and their marked veneration for godliness, sobriety, and honesty ; and that in all probability, as a respectable layman in an adjoining parish remarks, “ the good effects of Mr. Erskine’s ministry in the parish of Portmoak will continue for several generations to come.” In the Statistical Account of this Parish, written between thirty and forty years since, the reverend author, although in the whole account, he has not chosen, in a single instance, to introduce the name of Ebenezer Erskine, does ample justice to the character of the parishioners. “ They are uncommonly regular,” says he, “ in the discharge of religious duties, and, with a few exceptions, are industrious, sober, and peaceable. During the residence of the present incumbent, there is no instance of any one being punished either by fine, banishment, or death. In a collection made some years ago for the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, and in one lately for a poor widow of the parish, the charity and humanity of the parishioners appeared conspicuous.” *

The usefulness of this distinguished clergyman was not confined to those who were favoured, in providence,

* Statist. Acc. of Scotland, vol. v. pp. 165-6.

with his immediate pastoral inspection. The increasing celebrity of his character as a faithful preacher, and an able defender of evangelical truth, allured many serious Christians from other parishes, and even from places at the distance of sixty or seventy miles, to attend the administration of the Lord's Supper at Portmoak. The public collections made on such occasions, agreeably to custom, gradually rose till they more than tripled their original amount. About the year 1718, it was found necessary to provide a large supply of additional tokens for communicants.* The concourse of hearers, particularly on the Sabbath, was very great. The people still point out with pleasure those convenient spots on the side of a hill, where two distinct assemblies were formed for a series of years in the open air, besides the audience that met in the church. At these sacramental solemnities, it may be stated in passing, it was usual for public worship to begin on the Fast-day at ten o'clock A. M.; on Saturday at twelve noon; on Sabbath at eight in the morning, and on Monday at nine. The services of those days were often accompanied with a powerful blessing from above. So signal was the success attending the Gospel and its sacred institutions, that many on their death-beds spoke of the hills of Portmoak, as Bethels where God Almighty had met with them, and imparted signal manifestations of his glory and love.†

* Portmoak MS. The increase in the number of partakers appears also, from this circumstance, that a memorandum in one of Mr. Erskine's Note books, written in 1723, relates to commissioning wine for 2067 communicants.

† Gospel Truth, p. 57.

The following extract from Mrs. Balderston's Diary furnishes one slight notice of the religious and joyful impressions experienced at these solemn assemblies :

“ *July 28, 1717.* The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was given at Portmoak, my brother Ebenezer's parish. I was there. Though under a cloud, yet I heard the voice of the Father saying unto me, ‘ This is my beloved Son ; hear him ;’ and I went to the table under a sense of my own vileness, with an eye of faith to the Mediator's fulness, and saw that in him I am complete. They say that to the comfortable *felt experience of many*, it was as great a day of the Gospel as ever they witnessed.”

In the numerous services attending these solemn and extraordinary gatherings, the assistance of a great number of ministers was indispensably requisite. The men whose brotherly aid he solicited and received were eminent alike for soundness of principle and holiness of practice. Grateful for their valuable labours at Portmoak, he cheerfully returned them ; and wherever he appeared, his ministrations were very acceptable and useful. He often assisted in administering the Lord's Supper, to the delight and edification of Christians, both in his immediate vicinity and in more distant parishes. His aid was frequently given, amongst others, to the ministers of Edinburgh ; and his ministrations in that city, no doubt, were the means of communicating spiritual refreshment to not a few, similar to that which Mrs. Balderston, according to her own statement, experienced. When detailing the various services of the Spring Communion in the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh, 1719, this good woman says,

“ The preparation day was the 7th March. My

brother Ebenezer's text was Song ii. 8. 'The voice of my Beloved, &c.'—a very great and sweet sermon, which my soul closed with. I cannot remember sermons, but this I know to my blessed experience, that 'He is my beloved; he is mine and I am his;' and he is my faithful God, and nothing will ever be able to separate me from his love."

The discourses of this faithful minister were blessed not only for consoling the serious hearer, but also for awakening the drowsy conscience, and softening the obdurate heart. Of this the following singular instance is confirmed by testimony which seems entitled to credit.

At one time, after travelling, towards the end of the week, from Portmoak to the banks of the Forth, on his way to Edinburgh, he, with several others, was prevented by a storm from crossing that frith. Thus obliged to remain in Fife during the Sabbath, he was employed to preach, it is believed, in Kinghorn. Conformably to his usual practice, he prayed earnestly in the morning for the divine countenance and aid in the work of the day; but suddenly missing his note-book, he knew not what to do. His thoughts, however, were directed to that command, "Thou shalt not kill;" and having studied the subject with as much care as the time would permit, he delivered a short sermon on it in the forenoon after the lecture. Having returned to his lodging, he gave strict injunctions to the servant that no one should be allowed to see him during the interval of worship. A stranger, however, who was also one of the persons detained by the state of the weather, expressed an earnest desire to see the minister; and having with difficulty obtained admittance, appeared

much agitated, and asked him, with great eagerness, whether he knew him, or had ever seen or heard of him. On receiving assurance that he was totally unacquainted with his face, character, and history, the gentleman proceeded to state that his sermon on the sixth command had reached his conscience; that he was a *murderer*; that being the second son of a Highland laird, he had some time before, from base and selfish motives, cruelly suffocated his elder brother, who slept in the same bed with him; and that now he had no peace of mind, and wished to surrender himself to justice, to suffer the punishment due to his horrid and unnatural crime. Mr. Erskine asked him if any other person knew any thing of his guilt. His answer was, that so far as he was aware, not a single individual had the least suspicion of it; on which the good man exhorted him to be deeply affected with a sense of his atrocious sin, to make an immediate application to the blood of sprinkling, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; but at the same time, since, in providence, his crime had hitherto remained a secret, not to disclose it, or give himself up to public justice. The unhappy gentleman embraced this well-intended counsel in all its parts, became truly pious, and maintained a friendly correspondence with this “servant of the Most High God” in future life. It is added, that after he withdrew, the minister had the happiness to recover the manuscript formerly missing; and, in consequence, preached in the afternoon on the topic he had originally in view.

We shall conclude this chapter with a few notices of the Fathers and Brethren alluded to above, with whom Mr. Erskine corresponded in clerical services during

his residence at Portmoak ; those of them at least, whose history is, in some points, particularly connected with his own.

Among his seniors in office, the Rev. JOHN SHAW is entitled to very respectful remembrance. This valuable pastor, after ministering for a short period at Newton, in the presbytery of Dalkeith, was translated to Leslie, November 9, 1698, where he laboured nine years with great approbation. It was the remark of the people of that parish, that during Mr. Shaw's ministry, " every Sabbath was like a communion Sabbath, and a communion Sabbath like the gate of heaven." He decidedly refused a pressing call which was given to him to Perth in December 1704 ; but having afterwards received an invitation to South Leith, he was persuaded to accept of it, and was consequently admitted there in spring 1708.* His ministrations in this new charge proved acceptable and useful. Mrs. Balderston makes frequent mention in her diary of his edifying sermons. The last time she heard him, which was in the Canongate Church in July 1735, she was richly comforted by his discourse. Her brother, Mr. Ralph Erskine, was also much benefited by a sermon he heard him preach in his youth, as appears from a letter of sympathy he wrote to Mr. Shaw at a time of personal and domestic affliction in March 1731.† Ebenezer, too, loved and revered him as a father in Christ. We have seen that he sat some years under his ministry at Leslie, and that he experienced his friendly attention as a member of Kirkaldy Presbytery, both when li-

* Records of Kirk. Presb.

† See Rev. John Brown's Coll. of Relig. Let. No. 42.

censed to preach, and when ordained to the ministry. He enjoyed the advantage also, we doubt not, of a frequent interchange of services with him, at least before his translation to Leith.

The Rev. ANDREW WARDROPE was another near neighbour and much esteemed father. For some years this godly man was one of the ministers of Kirkaldy; but influenced partly by the love of study and retirement, and partly by the violent and unreasonable treatment he met with from two individuals exercising the magistracy in that town, he acquiesced in a call he received about 1700 to the small and retired charge of Ballingry.* Here he laboured with zeal and fidelity till the day of his death, which took place at the beginning of the year 1717. Mr. Wardrope, the reader will recollect, was the minister who moderated at Portmoak when a call was given to Mr. Erskine, and who also presided at his ordination there. From that time, as the diary fully shows, the most friendly intercourse subsisted betwixt them, and they were always prepared to perform offices of kindness and sympathy towards each other.

The Rev. JAMES WEBSTER, of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh, was not only a highly valued friend and correspondent of Mr. Erskine, but the father of his second wife. This good man received his education at the University of St. Andrews. From his youth he discovered a warm attachment to evangelical doctrine, and to the principles of Presbytery. In the years 1678–9 he suffered an imprisonment of eighteen months in the tolbooth of Dundee, merely because he

* Records of Kirk. Presb.

was convicted of attending a "house conventicle" in that town.* After enduring further hardships at Dumfries in 1685-6, he undertook the pastoral care of an indulged Presbyterian meeting at Craigmillar, near Edinburgh. Subsequently to the Revolution, he was settled at Whitekirk, East Lothian; but about 1700 was translated to Edinburgh, where he persisted in his work with great energy and success, till he entered the joy of his Lord, May 17, 1720. He published a small volume of Communion Sermons in 1705; and some time after his death, another volume, entitled "Select Sermons," was printed. The proofs which this eminent man exhibited in the ecclesiastical courts of zeal and resolution in the cause of truth will fall to be afterwards noticed. Dr. Alexander Webster, the honoured founder of the scheme for the benefit of Widows of the Scottish Clergy, was the son of this Mr. Webster, and thus brother-in-law to Mr. Erskine.

The Rev. JOHN GIBB of Cleish, and ANDREW URE of Fossaway were formerly mentioned, as ministers whose discourses proved refreshing to their brother of Portmoak. Both of them were probably ordained a few years before him. Mr. Gibb died about the year 1742, in the 74th year of his age and the 43d of his ministry. To primitive integrity and simplicity of character, he added unwearied diligence in pastoral duty. At one time, it is said, he travelled during a storm to the extremity of his parish, to comfort a godly man in his dying moments. The cottage being solitary, and owing to the inclemency of the weather no other person venturing that evening to visit the fa-

* Wodrow's Hist. vol. i. Book ii. ch. 13. sect. 6.

mily, he watched with them all night, performing with alacrity every kind office in his power; and when he returned home next day, made the remark "that it was no small honour to sit up a winter's night with an heir of glory, or (in his own homely but expressive language) with a *piece of heaven's plenishin*."* In the year 1737 he preached a sermon, at the opening of the Synod of Fife, from Ps. xlviii. 12-14, in which he bore an explicit testimony against errors opposed to the doctrine of grace, and against the violent intrusion of ministers by the law of patronage. Agreeably to his wish, modestly expressed on his death-bed, this discourse, bearing the title of "The Beauty and Strength of Gospel Zion," was published after his decease, as "his dying testimony to the Church of Scotland."

Mr. URE of Fossaway was a man of the same heavenly temper. He is "still talked of in that parish and neighbourhood, as eminent for talent, piety, and ministerial fidelity." He was the maternal grandfather of that judicious and worthy minister, the late Rev. John Belfrage, Falkirk.†

The Rev. WILLIAM MONCRIEFF of Largo must also be noticed as a beloved contemporary and fellow-labourer in the Gospel. This excellent man was a son of Mr. Alexander Moncrieff, minister of the parish of Scoonie, Fife-shire, before the Restoration; who, in August 1660, was committed to prison, and subsequently endured a variety of sufferings, which were terminated by his death a few months before the Revolution. "I wish his worthy son," says Wodrow, referring to Mr. Moncrieff of Largo, "at present a reverend and useful minister in

* Portmoak MS.

† See "A Father's Memorial" subjoined to "the Monitor to Families," by Dr. Henry Belfrage.

this church, could be prevailed with to give us a Life of this holy person.”* The Rev. Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, one of the first four Seceding Brethren, was nephew to William, and in the year 1712, resided with him some time at Largo, where he reaped signal benefit from his uncle’s domestic exercises and public ministrations.† From the terms in which he is mentioned in Mrs. Balderston’s Diary, it appears that Mr. William Moncrieff was held in high estimation by pious Christians in Edinburgh. He was indeed earnestly invited to accept of a charge in that city; but his delight in retirement and love to his people in Fife prevailed against every argument that could be urged for his translation.

Few of Mr. Erskine’s correspondents were dearer to him than his immediate neighbour, the Rev. JAMES BATHGATE, Orwell. He was a very acceptable preacher, and a man of gentle dispositions, but fervent in religion, and zealous in the cause of evangelical truth. It pleased providence to remove him by death, in the prime of life, and in the midst of his usefulness, March 30, 1724. He was the youngest of all the Twelve Brethren, who, in 1721, united in a Representation to the General Assembly respecting the act passed in condemnation of the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and was the first of their number that departed this life. His death was uncommonly triumphant, and with his last breath he expressed the high satisfaction he felt in reflecting on the part he had been enabled to act in regard to that public appearance. Both the Erskines held him in great esteem. Ebenezer calls him “that

* Wod. Hist. vol. i. book i. ch. 2. sect. 5.

† Christ. Mag. vol. viii. pp. 89-96, 133-140.

worthy servant of Christ," and represents him as having sustained the sharpest arrows of reproach for the sake of the truth.* Ralph testified his veneration for his memory by composing an Elegy on his death, the best verses of which have been published.†

Several other excellent clergymen with whom Mr. Erskine less or more interchanged services during his ministry at Portmoak must here be passed over, including his dear brother Ralph—who, though connected with a different Presbytery, was settled at a moderate distance from him;—and all those Brethren who afterwards took part with him in his secession from the established judicatories. We cannot stop to narrate the interesting facts that are known relative to the Rev. JAMES HOGG, Carnock, and JOHN WILLIAMSON, Inveresk, who heartily concurred with him in their views and exertions respecting the Marrow Controversy;‡ nor to state the few circumstances we have learned regarding his co-presbyter, the Rev. DAVID PITCAIRN, who was settled at Dysart in 1708, and continued to discharge his ministry there with ability and diligence for about the space of half a century; or his neighbour, the Rev. Mr. M'GILL of Kinross, a man equally esteemed for piety and learning, and the Rev. GEORGE GILLESPIE of Strathmiglo, whom, though he disapproved of his procedure in reference to the Marrow question, he sincerely valued for the general soundness of his sentiments, as well as for his active zeal in behalf of practical religion.

* See his Preface to Sermon on Tit. iii. 2.

† See Gospel-Truth, pp. 134, 135.

‡ See Memoirs of the Public Life of Mr. James Hogg, and Brown's Gospel-Truth, pp. 119-132.

Omitting any further account of these worthy men, and not even naming a few others that might be honourably mentioned, we shall only record, in conclusion, some particulars relating to the Rev. JOHN CURRIE, of Kinglassie, whom the subject of this memoir long numbered among his most intimate and inseparable friends.

Mr. Currie, having studied at Edinburgh, was licensed by the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, April 9, 1705. The September following, he was ordained at Kinglassie by the same Presbytery, Mr. Shaw, then of Leslie, presiding. He proved a faithful, laborious, and successful pastor. He was distinguished as an early riser, a close student, rigidly temperate, yet a cheerful and lively companion. His son, Mr. William Currie, was licensed in the year 1744, and ordained his assistant and successor, March 13, 1750; on which occasion the father preached and presided. He died in a good old age, in September 1766, deeply regretted by his people; many of whom had, under his pastoral care, attained to eminence in Christian knowledge and piety. His son did not survive him many years.*

Messrs. Currie and Erskine having formed habits of mutual intimacy in early life, their settlement as copresbyters in each others neighbourhood was hailed by both as a very happy event. Various pleasing testimonies to the tender affection, and confidential intercourse, that subsisted betwixt them for many years, are supplied by the Diary. We produce an example.

“*Portmoak, Dec. 29, 1713.* Mr. Currie sent me word this day, that his old trouble, the gravel, had recurred upon him as much as ever. I wrote a line to him to this purpose :

* Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

“Dear Brother,

Be not discouraged. You know the rose, the sweetest of flowers, grows upon the thorn. I hope this thorny dispensation will yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The blessed Rose of Sharon never smells sweeter, than when he is found among the thickets of affliction; and one smell of his perfumed garments will make the wilderness like Sharon, and like the garden of God. Ere long, the clouds and shadows will pass away. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; and then we shall find that our heaviest afflictions had been light and for a moment. Oh for grace to acquiesce in the operations and prescriptions of our skilful Physician, and to yield implicit submission, even when the potion is most bitter to sense. Surely all is well done that he doth; and all shall end well to them that love him—and I think you will not deny that he hath won your heart. These things you know well enough; but perhaps they may refresh your memory.”

The following instance of their friendship is still more remarkable.—A superstitious attention to dreams, as was hinted in a preceding chapter, is an evidence of mental imbecillity; and the rash and bold interpretation of them may produce most pernicious effects. Yet since “a dream cometh through the multitude of business,” since the character of the individual gives a tinge to the visions of the night; and since they often involve a reference to persons that stand high in our esteem, these nocturnal illusions, duly considered, may contribute not only to make men better acquainted with their own prevailing inclinations, but to confirm their attachment to the pious, to reprove past neglects, and to stimulate

to well-doing. It is possible for a dream to be of such a description, that it can scarcely be altogether overlooked by a man of the most vigorous intellect. Of this nature was that impressive and heavenly vision, which Mr Erskine had when recovering from a dangerous fever, and which he thus relates :

“ *March 29, 1714.* I remember also, that about the end of my fever, I had a dream, which was pleasant to me. I thought that my dear brother, Mr. John Currie, and I were both in the separate state, and that we were together carried up above the sun, moon, and stars, and that we came to the place of the blessed—the gate of glory. However, there was, I thought, a vail betwixt us and that blessed place, where Christ is, and all his redeemed company, so that although we saw some glimmerings of glory through the vail, yet we could not get access. At length, One came to us in human shape, and asked us what we were doing there? Unto whom I replied, that we would *fain* be in among the rest of the redeemed company, to sing hallelujahs to Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. He answered that we could not enter at that time, in regard our Master had more service for us upon earth. I thought, seeing the Lord had more service for us, I was content; though, if it had been the Lord’s will, I would rather have chosen to be among the redeemed company within the vail. I asked him that spoke to us, however, if it be so, how should we win back again to the earth; for there is a great gulf betwixt us and it? He answered, I know no way you can win back, unless you get a convoy of angels. On which, I thought we came back; but how—I cannot tell. The dream was sweet to me in my sleep, and pleasant also when I awaked.”

This is all that the Diary contains on the subject ; but tradition embellishes the story by some additional circumstances. Mr. Currie, it is alleged, was favoured on that very night, with a vision entirely parallel ; and after he awoke, and began to ruminate on its probable import, he became apprehensive, that his beloved friend might be dead, or dying ; and immediately took a journey to Portmoak, where he arrived at an early hour. Mr. Erskine, embracing him with more than usual warmth, expressed his happiness at seeing him in the land of the living, and proceeded to inform him of the imaginations with which his mind had been agitated amid the slumbers of the preceding night. After mutual explanation, they found that each of them had had a dream to the very same effect ; and they employed the forenoon of that day, as became the servants of the God of spirits, in improving the solemn admonition they had thus jointly received, and exciting each other to redouble their diligence in their Master's service, that they might stand prepared, to render a good account of their stewardship, when their Lord should say, "Ye shall be no longer stewards." The vouchers for the story in this romantic shape, are two respectable persons ; to whom it is reported to have been communicated by the parties ;—to one by the minister of Portmoak, and to the other by the minister of Kinglassie.* Without the least violation of charity, however, unintentional exaggerations may be suspected. It is quite credible that Mr. Erskine, shortly after the dream, enjoyed the pleasure of a visit from his friend ; that he stated to him the particulars ; and that the two good men took occa-

* Portmoak MS. Christ. Repos. vol. iii. p. 707.

sion to exhort one another to increased vigilance and faithfulness in the prospect of their Lord's coming. But since the Diary makes no mention of Mr. Currie having had a similar dream on the same night, this part of the story, in all probability, is apocryphal.

Another instance of the brotherly confidence which these two ministers reposed in each other, is supplied by a letter from "Ebenezer Erskine" to Mr. Currie, published at the beginning of a pamphlet, containing a sermon on Matt. v. 20, preached by the latter at Kirkaldy, Nov. 12, 1727. Mr. Currie, it appears from that letter and from his own preface, had incurred the displeasure of some individuals in that town and parish, both by a treatise on the people's divine right to choose their own pastors, of which he was the reputed author ;* and by the firm opposition he had given to the measures they had "taken for supplying their vacancy with a minister, and for settling elders, without the consent of the people, over whom they are made overseers." These prejudiced hearers, therefore, thought proper to carp at a few expressions, not exactly suited to fastidious ears, which had fallen from the lips of this faithful minister, in the course of an excellent sermon ; and he was induced to publish it for his own vindication. Mr. Erskine states in his letter that, having read a copy of his discourse in manuscript, he saw "nothing in it but what might appear with boldness and confidence before the world, either from press or pulpit ;" and that he had "heard some of his auditors say that their souls were refreshed and edified in hearing ;" and he affectionately reminds him of several considerations, fitted to cheer and

* Jus Populi Divinum.

support him under the unjust reproach he was permitted to suffer from "the envenomed tongue of calumny."

The sweets of friendship, in common with every other earthly blessing, are held by a precarious tenure. At the commencement of those rigorous measures, adopted by the General Assembly and its Commission towards Mr. Erskine and his three associates, which terminated in their Secession, Mr. Currie gave them his countenance and sympathy—co-operating with their friends, who strenuously remonstrated against that injurious course of procedure. But after the publication of the Judicial Act and Testimony by the Associate Presbytery, he not merely withdrew his brotherly favour and support from his old long-trying friend and neighbour; but, both from the pulpit and the press, inveighed with great severity against him and his brethren, as the authors of a causeless division in the Church. He was considered, indeed, as the grand champion of the national establishment, and received from the General Assembly, not only cordial thanks for his valued services, but still more substantial expressions of gratitude.* Amid the mournful differences which, in this dark and imperfect state, not unfrequently arise between good men, who had once "taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company," it is most refreshing to think that there is a world of light and perfection on high, where the true friends of the Saviour shall all meet at last, "without blame, before him in love;" and where, through the ages of eternity, no diversity of sentiment or alienation of affection shall ever occur to interrupt the harmony, or impair the joy.

* Struth. Hist. Scot. vol. ii. p. 57.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Erskine's conduct as a member of Church Courts—Oath of Abjuration—Marrow Controversy—Vindication of his Discourses—Attachment to Confession of Faith—Fasts and Thanksgivings—Christian zeal for the Saviour's Divinity—Termination of the second process against Professor Simson.

WHILST Mr. Erskine exerted himself with fidelity and diligence in preaching the Gospel and administering its ordinances, and in performing his various parochial duties, he also felt the obligations arising from his character as a member of the superior ecclesiastical courts.

His attendance on the meetings of the Presbytery, and the provincial Synod to which he belonged, was regular; and he bore his full share in the business. We find him repeatedly chosen Moderator of his Presbytery; and in several instances, as in the years 1715 and 1730, appointed one of its representatives in the General Assembly. Another duty which occasionally devolved on him was, moderating in Calls, as at Ballingry in the year 1717, some months after the death of Mr. Wardrope, when Mr. Clow, of Leslie, was appointed to preach, and to aid him in the transaction “as his assessor.” It fell to his share also, on some occasions, to preside at the ordination or admission of ministers. In January 1712, for example, when Mr. James Dickson was translated from South Leith to Markinch, he

presided at his admission, and preached on Rom. x. 15. He took his turn too, with his brethren, as might have been expected, in supplying vacant parishes within the bounds of the Presbytery. He was appointed, for instance, to preach a Sabbath at Burntisland in May 1711, after the translation of the Rev. John Cleghorn to Wemyss; at Kennoway in 1715, after the decease of Mr. Russell; and at Markinch, after the death of Mr. Dickson, who departed this life in August 1730.

As a means of improvement in theological learning, it was customary in those days for each minister, by rotation, to deliver, in the presence of his brethren at the meetings of the Presbytery, a critical discourse on some verse or passage of Scripture. Mr. Erskine, accordingly, was required at one time to prepare an Exercise on Rom. x. 16.*

The sufferings undergone by the Presbyterians of Scotland, during the reigns of Charles II. and James VII., were not to be forgotten. Wodrow's History is a valuable and enduring monument, not only of his own diligence and fidelity, but also of the interest generally felt by his contemporaries in the affairs of that bloody period. Partly at the instance of that respectable historian, Synods and Presbyteries, as well as individual clergymen, used their endeavours to collect accurate and full information respecting the facts. In the minutes of Kirkaldy Presbytery for 1712, it is recorded, that a Committee was appointed to receive and revise papers relating to "the sufferings under Prelacy, that

* All the above particulars, detailed, perhaps, with unnecessary minuteness, are taken from the Records of Kirkaldy Presbytery.

they may be prepared for the Synod ;” and that, as a member of this Committee, “ Mr. Erskine gave in the papers to the Committee of Synod.”

During the twenty-eight years that this active minister continued a member of the Presbytery of Kirkaldy and the Synod of Fife, he enjoyed great happiness in his intercourse with many of the brethren belonging to these courts ; but his comfort in some of them was considerably marred and interrupted by the differences and debates which arose. These unhappy contentions originated chiefly in various public measures, civil and ecclesiastical, which gave rise to collision of sentiment, and created animosities and strife throughout the whole country. Amid the agitation of the controversies referred to, it is not pretended that the conduct of the subject of this memoir was entirely faultless ; but impartial inquirers will see ground to conclude that, on the whole, he discovered an enlightened and steadfast attachment to the cause of truth and duty ; and that his ardent zeal was tempered with meekness and prudence.

THE OATH OF ABJURATION imposed in the year 1712, was a sad grievance to the Scottish clergy, and proved a fertile source of mutual alienation and bitter disputes, both among ministers and people. This oath was regarded with jealousy, as it revived the painful remembrance of those ambiguous and ensnaring oaths which had formerly been imposed by the house of Stewart. It was extremely obnoxious to staunch Presbyterians, because it seemed to imply an approbation of the diocesan episcopacy and unscriptural ceremonies

established in the Church of England; the security of that Church being the avowed design of the oath.* In addition to this and several other particular objections, it was detested as but one branch of a system then formed for the total overthrow of the Presbyterian government and discipline in Scotland. On this trying occasion, about a third part of the clergy discovered a most laudable firmness. Though they were enjoined to swear this vexatious oath, on pain of ejection from their churches, and of paying “an exorbitant fine of L.500 sterling;”† and though the strict exaction of the penalty was at first universally expected, they chose rather to run every hazard than to violate their judgment and conscience.

Mr. Erskine took his place amongst the non-jurors. It was his earnest prayer to God, that he would lead him in the path of duty and integrity; and he firmly determined, in the strength of grace, to avoid sin, whatever suffering might be the consequence. What follows may serve as a specimen of his magnanimous language:

“*P. Sept. 21, 1712.* Sabbath, about 8 at night. I went to private devotion.—My soul was lifted up towards the Lord. I was made to cry out, O Lord, my worldly enjoyments, my soul, my body, my heart’s blood, are at thy service. I would reckon it my glory, my crown, to go to a stake, a cross, a fire, or a gibbet, for thee. I am content to be hanged, beheaded, quartered, for thee; if thy cause require it, and if thou wilt bear me through, and be with me.”

* Boston’s Memoirs, p. 275.

† Ibid, p. 273.

His decided disapprobation of the oath in its original form is thus expressed :

“ *P. Oct. 28, 1712.* This is the day wherein all the ministers of the Church of Scotland are to swear the Abjuration Oath, by the appointment of the Parliament of Britain ; and I find that the far greater part of the ministers of this Church will take the oath this day. This morning I was somewhat distressed with the condition of the church in this land, and to think that the ministers thereof should take an oath, which I think inconsistent with their profession. I think it was somewhat remarkable that the chapter which I happened to read this morning for my ordinary was Isaiah xlviii. the first verse of which is this, ‘ Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah ; which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.’ This being the first verse I read, had something of a language, I thought, with respect to the ministers of this church, who are to swear through Scotland this day.”

Two days after the date of this entry, he attended a meeting of Presbytery ; and, as the Record shows, both he and Mr. Currie, of Kinglassie, requested and obtained supply of sermon to their respective charges till next meeting, “ as they were to be absent.” These two brethren, having exposed themselves to the penalty by declining the oath, had at first resolved to discontinue preaching for a time, till they should see in what manner government determined to dispose of them. But, as appears from the letter to the Earl of Rothes, formerly inserted, one of them, at least, on farther consideration and inquiry, found reason to deem this volun-

tary intermission inexpedient, and resumed the exercise of his office sooner than he had intended.

The native candour of his mind, and his love of peace, induced him at one time so far to listen to the arguments and entreaties, employed by some brethren whom he respected, in favour of the oath in the less objectionable shape in which it was imposed in the year 1715, that he openly declared his willingness to take it. A few years after his secession from the establishment, this circumstance was mentioned by his *quondam* friend, the author of the "Essay on Separation," apparently with a design to fix a stain on his character. The accusation is referred to in the able reply which was made to that Essay ;* and we think we cannot do better than record the particulars, as detailed by the judicious Mr. Wilson, and by the accused individual himself, in the explanatory letter produced.

"But in regard the author of the Essay, p. 104, with design, as appears, to throw a reflexion upon my reverend brother, Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, when speaking of the last form of the Oath of Abjuration, he says, 'Of the lawfulness of which last form, the Reverend Mr. Ebenezer Erskine was so much convinced, that he gave it under his hand to the Laird of *Naughton*, Sheriff-depute of Fife, that he had clearness to take it, and should take it when required, though there was something peculiar in his circumstances, so as he would not take it that day on which it was taken by other ministers of his Presbytery. This is no secret ; for his obligation to take it was read openly in the Synod of Fife.'—Upon

* A Defence of the Reformation Principles of the Church of Scotland, &c. by William Wilson, A. M. minister of the Gospel at Perth, pp. 329, 330.

the above story, reported by the author of the Essay, I wrote the Rev. Mr. Erskine; and he gave me a return, wherein he expresses himself with his ordinary candour and ingenuity; and I think it not improper to insert it here. It is as follows:

‘R. and D. B.

In answer to your’s, relating to that paragraph in Mr. Currie’s Essay, which concerns me in particular, I have nothing to say; but only, without irritation of mind, to acknowledge that I was so far overcome with the subtle arguings of brethren who were clear about the oath in its second edition, as to declare that I had freedom also. But as I did not take it at that time, so, upon after-thought and consideration, I saw just cause to alter my judgment, and declared so much in a letter to the Laird of *Naughton*, which was read, as I heard, before the Synod of Fife. I shall only add, that I bless the Lord, that, when my foot had well nigh slipt, his mercy held me up, and I hope, shall help and uphold me to the end. I am, your’s, &c.

Ebenezer Erskine.’

“From the above letter,” continues Mr. Wilson, “the reader may see, that Mr. Erskine ingenuously acknowledges what the author of the Essay alleges, that he had once clearness to take the oath, but, notwithstanding of this, he saw just cause afterwards to alter his judgment; and I think this is no disparagement to the Rev. Mr. Erskine’s character.”

To what the worthy author of the Defence has thus justly remarked, we may add that a vacillation somewhat similar was shown and acknowledged by others who sustained the highest reputation for fidelity to the cause of Christ. “I desired still,” says Mr. Boston, re-

ferring to this oath, even in its original form, "to hang about the Lord's hand for further light in that matter ; and I durst not say to any what I would do."*

This unhappy oath, in fact, perplexed the minds of many good men ; and created discord betwixt not a few who had previously been united in the closest bonds of friendship. It produced a variance, among others, between the Rev. Alexander Anderson and Mr. Erskine. Mr. Anderson was for some time minister of Falkland, and afterwards translated to St. Andrews. In 1735 he was chosen Moderator of the General Assembly, and appointed one of a deputation sent by the Assembly that year to London to present petitions to Parliament and to the Crown for a repeal of the Act of the 10th Queen Anne, relating to patronage.† A brotherly correspondence which had once subsisted betwixt this eminent clergyman and Mr. Erskine, appears to have been terminated by a difference which sprung from the oath in question. He was one of several "brethren who had endeavoured to wound his reputation, because they knew him to be no friend to the oath," and who were prepared to put the most unfavourable construction on passages of sermons at all capable of being applied to that delicate topic. Mutual recriminations in the pulpit betwixt the two opposite parties on this question were possibly not uncommon.

The Diary contains a curious entry, which bears date, Oct. 12, 1714, and gives a circumstantial detail of an encounter that happened between these two ministers in the church of Dysart, on the preceding day,

* Boston's Memoirs, p. 276.

† See Sir Henry Moncreiff's Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. John Erskine, p. 7.

being the Monday after the celebration of the Lord's Supper there, when both were employed to preach. The first sermon being assigned to Mr. Erskine, he discoursed on defection from Christ, and enumerated some of its symptoms and concomitants ; taking John vi. 66, for his text.* Mr. Anderson rose immediately after, and preached from Col. ii. 6. " Among other things implied in walking in Christ, he said it implied walking in love one towards another ;" and proceeded to make several remarks, which gave evidence that he applied to himself, and others who had taken the Oath of Abjuration, the observations which had fallen from the preceding speaker. " All divisions about lesser matters," said he, " where it is hard to tell who is in the right and who is in the wrong, are to be avoided ; and I entreat you to guard against all insinuations that have a tendency to alienate you from those ministers whom some reproach as guilty of defection."

" I remember," it is added in the Diary, " that after I had thought upon this sermon of mine, I was afraid that it might be excepted against by our jurant brethren, as if I were levelling at them, and therefore I had some thoughts of laying it aside ; but I had not freedom to do this, because I thought since I delivered nothing but the truths of Christ, if I should lay it aside, it would be a refusal to deliver the message which the Lord had given me, out of a fear of offending man ; and would not this be a pleasing of men rather than acting the part of a faithful minister and ambassador of Christ ? I recollect also, that before I preached this sermon, I read over some parts of it, which I thought were most liable

* See this Sermon in his Works. It is the second in order.

to exception, to my dear brother, Mr. John Currie. When he heard my notes, he indeed said that he thought they would take it to them ; but he saw nothing in what I had read but was safe and sound, and what I might preach with safety. I recollect also, that before I went to the pulpit, I prayed earnestly to God that morning, that if it was his message that I had put into my mouth, he might own and assist me : which request the Lord was graciously pleased to hear, for in preaching the Lord helped to a composure of spirit ; gave something of a door of utterance, and kept me from being damped and discouraged with the faces of men, notwithstanding there were a great many of my brethren present hearing me, who had taken the oath of abjuration ;—which I think much of, considering my natural faintness and pusillanimity. I desire to give glory and praise to my blessed Master, that he gave me a tongue to speak, and deliver his message ; for I am persuaded that I delivered nothing but what is founded on his holy word ; and this is what bears up my heart against the challenges and reproaches of men, as if I were an incendiary. That which furnishes me with the more peace is, that I spoke of no defections my brethren were chargeable with in particular ; but only of defection in general, and the bad consequences and fruits thereof, of which this was one, the rending of the church of Christ. And I think it does not look well in our brethren who have taken the oath, that we cannot speak of defections in public, but presently they apply it to themselves. If they thought themselves entirely innocent, and if they had the testimony of their conscience, why should their spirits be so rankled at the very naming of defections, especially when it is plain we have been guilty of palpable defec-

tions, both personal and public, from our former attainments and covenant engagements.—As to what Mr. Anderson said concerning my sermon in public; if there was any wrath, or malice, or bitterness, in my spirit, I wish the Lord may convince me of it, and give me repentance for it; for I am afraid there might be but too much of this. But it is a very hard matter, I think, that we should still be charged with bitterness and want of brotherly love, because we give our testimony against defections of the times.”

After all that had passed, Mr. Erskine manifested a sincere desire for reconciliation. The following entry affords satisfactory evidence of his forgiving and conciliatory temper :

“ *July 20, 1715.* Here follows the copy of a letter which I wrote to Mr. Alexander Anderson, inviting him to assist at the sacrament in this place :

R. D. B.

We design, if the Lord will, to celebrate the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper in this place on the 2d Sabbath of August. The Fast-day will be upon the Wednesday immediately preceding. I hope you will do me the favour to take a diet of preaching on the Fast-day with Mr. M'Gill and Mr. Clow, who, I suppose, will be collegiate with you.

It is uneasy for me to think there should be any misunderstanding betwixt me and a person whom I so much love and value; and therefore, Dear Brother, let all unhappy differences be buried for ever in silence, and let us in time coming construe favourably one another's words and actions, as becomes brethren—which I hope we are, in more respects than one. For my own part, whatever harsh thoughts you may have of

me, I can freely declare, with the utmost sincerity, that (though indeed of small value, yet such as they are,) you have had my cordial sympathy in your late affliction, and prayers for the Lord's countenance on your labours, and particularly on the great work you have in hand, and I hope I shall on all occasions show myself, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Your very affectionate Brother and Servant,

EBENEZER ERSKINE.

Portmoak, July 20, 1715.

With regard to Mr. Anderson's reply to this truly Christian letter, or the encouragement he gave to the kind proposal for the restoration of mutual friendship and brotherly correspondence, the Diary unfortunately is quite silent. On these points, therefore, we have no information. The measures adopted, however, some years after by this offended brother towards the object of his resentment, which the course of events will soon lead us to notice, did not well accord with the true spirit of forgiveness.

Whilst the Church of Scotland was agitated by dissensions arising from the Oath of Abjuration, the unnatural REBELLION of 1715 threw the whole country into a state of disorder and alarm. In those districts which the adherents of the Pretender had taken possession of, ecclesiastical, as well as civil business was in a great degree interrupted, and a variety of hardships undergone. This was the state of matters in Fifeshire, no less than in several other counties. The admission of the Rev. Robert Ponton at Kennoway, for example, had been appointed to take place on the 21st September 1715; but, owing to "the occurrences of the times," it was necessarily postponed till the 29th

of February 1716. For a series of months, it was hardly possible to obtain a meeting of Presbytery. At some meetings at Kirkaldy, the Presbytery spent part of the day in prayer. They "did not proceed to any business, the members not being come up, because of the present commotion in the country."* The usual labours of ministers in their parishes were also not a little obstructed and suspended. Mr. Erskine, among others, found it impracticable for some months to hold meetings of Session, or to perform the ordinary parochial duties of the week; and appears for a few Sabbaths to have been prevented from occupying the pulpit. At times he was under the necessity of spending the night in a friend's house at a distance from his manse, where he betook himself to repose, singing Psalm iv. 8.†

" I will both lay me down in peace,
And quiet sleep will take ;
Because thou only me to dwell
In safety, Lord, dost make."

His well-known loyalty rendered him peculiarly obnoxious to the abettors of the Rebellion. The accession of the House of Hanover, and the establishment of George I. on the British throne, in despite of the insidious steps which had been taken to restore the exiled family, gave him heart-felt joy. With great pleasure he observed the day of Thanksgiving for that happy event, held on the 20th January 1715, conformably to the King's Proclamation, and to an appointment by the Commission of the General Assembly. His best en-

* Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

† Portmoak MS.

deavours were employed to direct the attention of his hearers to the merciful interposition of Providence, by which their civil and religious liberties were preserved in the hour of peril, and to the practical improvement they should make of this wonderful display of the Divine goodness. During the very time of the rebellion, he warmly inculcated unshaken loyalty, and continued publicly to pray for King George. Owing chiefly to his influence also, a considerable number of his parishioners served as volunteers, and kept garrison in an adjacent castle.*

In the following extract from his Diary, his feelings are briefly, but strongly expressed :

“ *August 28, 1715.* This day I have got certain news of the death of the tyrant of France. He died Wednesday was eight days. Glory to God for cutting him off. ‘He cutteth off the spirits of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth.’ The mercy is so much the more remarkable, that, at this very time, the Jacobites are gathering to a head, and forming a camp in the Highlands at the Braes of Mar.”

The death of Louis XIV., at that critical conjuncture, appears to have excited similar sentiments among all the friends of the Protestant succession. Colonel Blackader, for instance, still more fully expresses his lively gratitude to God for the removal of that strenuous supporter of popery and tyranny. “We have got accounts,” says this pious officer, “of the death of the King of France. We have been long looking for it, but God’s time is the best time, and it has happened favourably at this crisis, when he had been laying de-

* Portmoak MS.

signs, and was upon the point of sending a Pretender to invade us. Perhaps this intervention of Providence may defeat their design. . . . We bless God for it, follow what will. He was the main pillar and support of antichrist's kingdom."—"I bless God," he says also, "that I have lived to see this great event which I wished so much, and was afraid never to see."*

The same spirit of patriotism which the minister of Portmoak discovered at the time when the standard of rebellion was erected, animated, we may notice, with very few exceptions, the whole body of the Presbyterian Clergy in Scotland. Their excellent temper and useful services on that occasion were handsomely acknowledged by the King, in his letter to the General Assembly, May 1716, in the following terms :

"The fresh proofs you have given us, during the course of the late unhappy and unnatural rebellion, of your firm adherence to those principles on which the security of our government and the happiness of our subjects do entirely depend, and the accounts we have from time to time received of your great care to infuse the same into the people under your charge, do engage us to return you our hearty thanks, and to renew to you the assurance we have formerly given you of our unalterable resolution to maintain the established government of the Church in that part of our kingdom of Great Britain, in the full enjoyment of all just rights and privileges."†

* Crichton's Life and Diary of Col. Blackader, ch. xix. pp. 460-1.

† Struth. Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. p. 435. See also a variety of interesting particulars respecting the loyalty of the clergy, pp. 290, 313, &c.

Happy had it been for the Church of Scotland, had she seen her ministers as perfectly united in warm attachment to the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ, as in affectionate loyalty to the House of Hanover. It is too evident, however, that the fact was otherwise. There was indeed a considerable proportion of the clergy who clearly understood and zealously maintained the truth in its purity and simplicity ; but there was a numerous class of a different description, some of whom entertained dark and confused conceptions of the plan of salvation, and others were visibly tinctured with the tenets of the Arminian school. Ebenezer Erskine, it is well known, held a conspicuous place among the friends of evangelical truth. The decided part he took in what is usually called the MARROW CONTROVERSY,* and his share in the vexatious treatment experienced by the strenuous defenders of the doctrine of grace, must now be adverted to.

With a view to check the progress of error and to diffuse correct sentiments among ministers and people, several Scottish clergymen had thought proper to countenance the printing and publishing of various evangelical books in Scotland, which had been long known and valued in England. Among these was the work entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, consisting chiefly of extracts from Luther and other eminent Pro-

* On this memorable contest, we refer the reader to Struth. Hist. vol. i. book v., but above all, to the Rev. Mr. Brown's "GOSPEL-TRUTH accurately stated and illustrated, &c." This is a work of considerable research, and contains the most ample view of the Marrow Controversy that has ever been published. The Marrow of Modern Divinity itself, with Boston's judicious Notes, ought also to be carefully perused.

testant Divines, compiled by Mr. Edward Fisher, a learned and worthy gentleman, and first published in the year 1646, with recommendations by some distinguished ministers of that age. The Act of Assembly 1717,* condemning a proposition maintained by the Presbytery of Auchterarder relative to the immediate access to Christ which the Gospel gives to a sinner, having very much grieved the minds of several intelligent ministers and others, Mr. Hogg, of Carnock, in compliance with their request, was induced to republish the First Part of the Marrow, with a Recommendatory Preface. But the opposers of what was styled in derision the *Auchterarder Creed*, resolving to show their power, and to mortify that worthy man, whose conscientious strictness had long rendered him obnoxious to those who boasted of more moderate views, persuaded the General Assembly, 1720, to pass a rash and unwarrantable Act, severely condemnatory of that little book as heretical and dangerous, and enjoining all the Ministers of the Church, not in any way to recommend that book, but to warn their people against perusing it, or receiving its doctrine. The great injury done to some precious truths of the Gospel by this precipitate Act pressed heavily on the spirit of Mr. Erskine, as well as the rest of the Twelve Brethren who joined in remonstrating against it, and of several others whom the fear of man, or an excess of caution, prevented from becoming their avowed coadjutors.

For many years prior to the passing of this famous Act of Assembly, agreeably to the details formerly

* See an account of this Act in the Testimony of the United Associate Synod, part i. ch. 3, pp. 31, 32.

given, he had cordially embraced, and faithfully preached, the pure doctrine of the grace of God. In a contest which had been agitated for a series of years before, among the clergy of the Synod of Fife, “touching the Covenant of Grace, whether it is conditional or absolute,”* he decidedly took part with those who held that this Covenant in its *making* betwixt the Father and the Son was strictly conditional, but in its *dispensation* to mankind is entirely absolute. With unfeigned sorrow he observed the prevalence of the *Neonomian* creed,—the system by which the Gospel is represented not as a revelation of free grace, but as a *new law* requiring faith, repentance, and sincere obedience as the conditions of salvation. In opposition to that dangerous, though specious and palatable scheme, he uniformly taught that Christ and his blessings are freely and unconditionally exhibited to sinners in the Gospel; that the everlasting righteousness of the Son of God is the only ground of justification; and that ministers ought to “beware of every thing that has the least tendency to foster a sinner in his hope of salvation by the works of the law.”

Firmly attached to these evangelical sentiments, he deeply regretted the condemnatory Act referred to, and was fully prepared to concur with Mr. Hogg, Mr. Boston, and other zealous friends of the pure Gospel, in measures calculated to procure its repeal, or at least to vindicate those invaluable truths which, in their apprehension, it had grievously injured. The Representation and Petition on this subject, presented to the Assembly, May 11, 1721, though originally composed by

* Boston's Mem. p. 360.

Mr. Boston, was revised and perfected by Mr. Erskine.* He was employed also to prepare the first draught of Answers to the Twelve Queries, afterwards enlarged and improved by the Rev. Gabriel Wilson, of Maxton—a masterly production, which discusses the points at issue with a perspicuity and energy that have commanded the admiration of celebrated theologians, who had no immediate concern in the contest. Ebenezer, we may add, wrote a private letter to an esteemed clergyman residing in his neighbourhood, in which he ably defends the conduct of the Representing Brethren. In this communication, which throws considerable light on the subject, he specifies particularly the precious truths condemned by the Act; shows that the mode of vindicating these truths adopted by the Twelve Brethren, though rather singular, was justified and rendered necessary by the peculiar circumstances of the case; and with a manly freedom avows his determination to persist in the cause.†

The Assembly, aware of the general offence which their violent condemnation of the Marrow had given, and influenced, perhaps, by the clear and forcible Answers returned to the Twelve Queries, which in ludicrous allusion to the *number* of the Twelve Represen-

* “It was agreed,” says Mr. Boston, when stating what was done at a meeting of the *Marrow-men*, as they were called, “that there should be a Representation to the Assembly about it,” (viz. the condemnatory act) “the forming whereof was committed to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, with whom our draught was lodged for that effect; and the revising of it, when formed, was committed to the Brethren in that country.” Boston’s Mem. p. 370.

† See Appendix, No. X.

ters they had thought proper to propose,* were pleased, on the 21st of May 1722, to pass a large explanatory act relating to the same book, expressed in more measured terms than their act of 1720. Even this new act, however, contained several positions contrary to sound doctrine; it confirmed, in place of rescinding the act complained of; and the Twelve Brethren, instead of receiving the thanks of the House for their seasonable, mild, and respectful remonstrance, were solemnly rebuked and admonished.

Nor was this the only castigation they met with. They were traduced in various publications as men of wild and Antinomian principles,—innovators in religion, who published tenets opposite to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms,—enemies to Christian morality,—troublers of Israel, puffed up with vanity and arrogance, and anxious to exalt themselves at the expense of their brethren. Similar reproaches were often cast on them from the pulpit by the dominant clergy of the age, particularly in sermons preached at the opening of Synods. Their unqualified submission, in fine, to the

* It was not on this occasion only that the number of these faithful men was indecorously sported with by their antagonists. A still more memorable instance of the same playful humour was exhibited by a Committee of the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale, in their strictures on the Rev. Gabriel Wilson's excellent sermon, entitled *THE TRUST*, preached at the opening of that Synod at Kelso, October 17, 1721. "They drew up a charge," as we are informed in the Preface to that sermon, "consisting of *twelve* remarks, *twelve* questions, and *twelve* slanders; for you must know that the number *twelve* is what some wanton kirk-men have taken pleasure to sport themselves with of late, though some of them have discovered how ridiculously straitened they have been to find their account."

Acts of Assembly regarding the Marrow was urged with rigour ; and, in several instances, ill-founded complaints against their public discourses were presented before the church courts.

Owing chiefly to the vehemence of Mr. Alex. Anderson, and of Principal Haddow, of St. Andrews, whom Mr. Boston designates “the spring of that black act of Assembly,”* the five representing brethren belonging to the Synod of Fife,† were treated with peculiar severity. At several meetings of the Synod, they were denounced as transgressors, and questioned in the most rigorous and inquisitorial manner. At a meeting at Cupar in Sept. 1721, some of Mr. Erskine’s discourses were judicially complained of ; in particular, a sermon preached at Largo that year, from Psalm lxxxix. 16. “In thy righteousness shall they be exalted ;” and another delivered on a fast-day before the administration of the Lord’s Supper at Orwell, on Psalm cxxxviii. 6. “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly—.” The Synod at the same meeting, passed a violent act, purporting to detail the result of the inquiry instituted into the conduct of all these five brethren, with reference to the Act of Assembly 1720 respecting the Marrow of Modern Divinity ; expressing “high dissatisfaction” at the liberties they had taken ; strictly enjoin-

* Mem. p. 371.

† These were, besides the subject of this memoir, the Rev. James Hogg, Carnock ; James Bathgate, Orwell ; Ralph Erskine and James Wardlaw, Dunfermline. The other seven Representatives were the Rev. Gabriel Wilson, Henry Davidson, Thomas Boston, and William Hunter, of the Presbytery of Selkirk ; John Williamson, Inveresk ; James Kid, Queensferry ; and John Bonar, Torphichen, of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale.

ing all the ministers of the Synod to observe that act; and ordaining all of them to subscribe the formula enjoined by the 10th Act of Assembly 1711,—as “a fresh evidence and document of their zeal for, and adherence to, the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this church.”*

Mr. Erskine was not merely arraigned at the bar of a provincial Synod. He was afterwards accused before a court of still higher authority. In May 1725, Mr. Anderson, anxious to prevent his translation from Portmoak to a more conspicuous sphere in the church, preferred heavy charges against him, in his absence, before the Commission of the General Assembly. On different pretexts, he decried a number of his sermons, some of which had been preached ten years before; and, at the same time, loaded him with various other accusations, partly frivolous, partly calumnious.†

Under all these afflicting and irritating circumstances, this faithful man was enabled to exercise a noble fortitude, united with Christian meekness and charity. He was accustomed to speak of the act 1720 as an *oversight*; and, in fact, a great proportion of the members of Assembly that year, there is reason to conclude, possessed, at that time, little or no personal acquaintance with the vilified book, and were induced to acquiesce in the act, merely by the injurious and artful representations of the committee by whom the busi-

* See the substance of this act in GOSPEL-TRUTH, p. 37.

† These accusations are particularly stated and repelled by Mr. Erskine in “An Apologetical Preface” prefixed to the first edition of his sermon on Rev. iii. 4. published 1725; which was his first publication.

ness was prepared. Notwithstanding the protest which he and his brethren had taken, deference to ecclesiastical authority led him to forbear publicly recommending the work; and even when he spoke favourably of it in private, he qualified his eulogy by telling the people that it contained some unguarded expressions. Towards those clergymen, too, from whom he had experienced the most unjust and illiberal treatment, he manifested a gentle and forgiving spirit. Such is the temper expressed in the following extract from a Preface to one of his published discourses :

“ As for that brother, [viz. Mr. Anderson,] although he endeavoured to do me much evil, God forbid that I should render evil for evil. I hope I have not so learned Christ, who, both by precept and example, has taught us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us. A spirit of revenge stands directly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel; it usurps the room of the sovereign Judge of all the earth, who has asserted it as his prerogative, that vengeance is his, and he will repay it. And, therefore, far be it from me to meditate revenge against my brother, by studying to support my character in the ruin of his. I hope, notwithstanding of the edge and keenness that seems to be upon his spirit against me and some others, God shall, in his own time, open his eyes and bring him to a better temper.”*

His attachment, nevertheless, to the truths condem-

* Apolog. Pref. to Sermon on Rev. iii. 4. 1st ed. See a similar passage in the Sermon on Ps. cxxxviii. 6. Head 5th.

ned by the acts of Assembly 1720 and 1722 remained unshaken. It is strikingly expressed in another paragraph of the same Preface:*

“I bless God,” says he, “I am so far from being shaken in that cause by attempts of this kind, [viz. to sully his character,] that I am rather more and more confirmed that the cause is the Lord’s. I look upon it as a piece of the greatest honour that was ever put upon me, that the Lord called me forth to lift up a banner, or yet to suffer reproach for his precious truths, which, I am convinced, suffered so much injury by the *Act condemnatory* 1720, and the *Act explicatory* 1722; that as I live, so I desire to die in this hope, that when some of this generation, who were the principal authors, and are the principal supporters of these acts, are off the stage; and when matters come to be impartially examined by a succeeding generation, whose honour shall not be dipt in the support of these acts, the design of our petition to the Assembly, and of our prayer to God shall be answered in their being repealed, both as injurious to truth, and to the true honour of the Church of Scotland; and that the children who are yet unborn shall praise the Lord, who stirred up any of this generation to contend for injured truth, that it might be handed down to them in purity. . . . However truth may be borne down for a time, yet, at length it shall be brought forth unto victory; and those who espouse its cause shall share in its triumphs. Rev. iii. 10.”

That the same ardent love to the doctrine of grace continued to characterize him till the day of his death,

* Pages viii—x.

is evident from the whole tenour of his subsequent conduct, both while he remained a member of the Established Church, and after his secession. Zeal for this doctrine, indeed, was a chief cause of his open withdrawal from brethren by whom it was disregarded and impugned. The discourses of his advanced years bear ample testimony to his unabated delight in pure evangelical truth ; as his sermons on “the Lamp ordained for God’s anointed,” delivered at the admission of Mr. Fisher at Glasgow in 1741 ; and on the Angel’s seal set upon God’s faithful servants,” preached in Bristo-church, Edinburgh, 1742. In which of his discourses, we may ask, does he not discover his inflexible attachment to *Marrow doctrine* ?

In the course of those keen discussions on this subject, which took place at the meetings of ecclesiastical courts, expressions occasionally fell from his lips, which, for a time at least, overawed and confounded his opponents. Thus at a meeting of the Synod of Fife at Cupar, when some members had openly denied the Father’s gift of Christ to sinners of the human family, he rose and said, “Moderator, our Lord Jesus says of himself, ‘My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.’ This he uttered to a promiscuous multitude ; and let me see the man who dares to affirm that he said wrong.” This short speech, aided by the dignity and energy with which it was delivered, made an uncommon impression on the members of Synod, and on all present.*

* This anecdote was communicated to the Rev. J. Brown, of Whitburn, by the late Mr. Henry Thomson, St Andrews, an upright and excellent man, who was present at that meeting of Synod.

With respect to the charges preferred against his discourses by Mr. Anderson, whilst he disavowed such expressions as were falsely or erroneously imputed to him, he never shrunk from asserting and maintaining those scriptural sentiments which he had really uttered. For his own vindication, too, he published the sermons objected to, being seven in number; and in prefaces placed at their front in the first editions, he refuted the censures of his accusers. The wisdom of providence brightly appears in thus rendering those very imputations, which wore so dark and ruinous an aspect towards him, the occasion of increasing his celebrity and extending his usefulness. To this providential arrangement, he himself devoutly adverts at the beginning of the Apologetical Preface referred to above, in the following terms:

“It is very probable that this and some other sermons now designed for the press, had slept in perpetual silence among my short-hand manuscripts, if holy and wise providence, which over-rules us in our designs and inclinations, had not, in a manner, forced me to yield to their publication, for my own necessary defence; when the earnest entreaty of some, dear to the Lord, could not prevail with me to fall in with any such proposal. The conduct of adorable Providence in this matter has brought me under such a conviction of a culpable obstinacy in resisting their solicitations, that I sincerely resolve, through grace, not to be so shy in time coming; especially if I find that these sermons, which are almost extorted from me, shall prove useful and edifying.”

The representing brethren in the county of Fife felt

it no small hardship, that the Act of Synod mentioned above, required a new subscription of the Confession of Faith, as interpreted conformably to those Acts of Assembly 1720 and 1722, which, according to their views, were inimical to many precious truths. This annoyance proved the more grievous to Mr. Erskine, because, owing as much, at least, to the inattention of the Presbytery as to his own forgetfulness, he had not formally subscribed the Confession of Faith, agreeably to the usual practice, either at the time of receiving license, or at his ordination. His accuser, who arraigned him before the Commission in the year 1725, founded one of his charges on this omission, and commented on it in very opprobrious terms. The accused minister, however, candidly acknowledges, and satisfactorily accounts for the neglect, and clears himself from the aspersions cast upon his character. On this point the following extracts may suffice :

“ When I was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Reverend Presbytery of Kirkaldy, and likewise when I was ordained by them minister in this parish of Portmoak, I owned the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of my faith, together with the Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, compiled by that Assembly, as agreeable to, and founded upon, the sacred oracles of the Scriptures of truth ; promising solemnly before God, angels, and men, never to teach or preach any doctrine but what was agreeable thereunto. And having done this with my mouth, I could not miss to have all imaginable freedom to subscribe it also with my hand, without supposing me guilty of the vilest prevarication, juggling and chicaning both with God and man ; the very thoughts of which do strike me with hor-

ror. But so it was that the book in which the rest of the Brethren had subscribed, not being offered me by the Clerk of the Presbytery, either when I was licensed or ordained; and time passing on, it entirely slipt both the Presbytery's memory and mine—insomuch that, after that, neither they, (for ought I know,) nor I had the least jealousy but that I had actually subscribed it with the rest of the Brethren, till the affair of the Representation of the Twelve Brethren against the fore-said condemnatory Act, 1720, came upon the field; and then it began to be noised abroad that I was certainly a man of unsound principles, in regard I had never signed the Confession of Faith, according to ordinary form. So soon as this report came to my ears, I made so little doubt of my having subscribed, that I contradicted the report as false in fact, till I had occasion to inspect the Presbytery-book for my name, but could not find it.* I presently told the Presbytery of the omission, declaring that I had all imaginable freedom *instantly* to subscribe it, protesting for the privilege, which, however, was refused me; because, as was alleged, but never yet proved, I differed in my sentiments from the received principles of this Church, asserted in the Confession of Faith.”†

After noticing the contrariety of the Act 1720 to some articles in the Confession; describing the manner in which his sermons were censured at the meeting of Synod at Cupar in September 1721; and quoting the

* As to this point then, the Minute of Presbytery, recording the circumstances of his ordination, was not strictly correct. See p. 75.

† Apol. Pref. pp. x. xi.

consequent Act of Synod referred to above, he thus proceeds :

“ When this Act came to be put into execution by the Presbyteries, within whose bounds we resided, we did indeed decline to subscribe in obedience to the foresaid Act, because, according to our view of matters, our subscription would have inferred an approbation both of the unjust stigma with which it was prefixed, and likewise of the Act of Assembly 1720, against which we had represented as prejudicial to truth. But though we declined to subscribe *in consequence unto* the foresaid Act of Synod, yet we declared we had all imaginable freedom to subscribe the Confession of Faith, in obedience to the Acts of Assembly, in the sense of the compilers, and of the Assembly 1647, that received it ; and in the plain and common sense of the words, together with the Formula 1711. A declaration to this purpose, not in these very words, was given in to the next ordinary Synod, and subscribed by James Hogg, Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, James Bathgate, and James Wardlaw. However, this was refused us, and the affair referred to the next Assembly. . . . When I found that neither Presbytery nor Synod would allow me to subscribe the Confession of Faith, unless I did it in obedience to the foresaid Act of Synod, I took the opportunity to subscribe it at home, with the Elders of my Congregation, March 4, 1723. I made intimation of this both to the Presbytery and Synod, when the first occasion offered ; that none might have a handle to represent that I startled at the Standards of our Church, or maintained principles inconsistent therewith.”*

* Apol. Pref. pp. xviii. xix.

The greater part of the circumstances, thus minutely detailed by Mr. Erskine, are expressly confirmed by the Records of Kirkaldy Presbytery ; in particular, by a minute, dated Dec. 14, 1721 ; which, however, it might seem quite superfluous to quote. From these Records it also appears, that the omitting, from inadvertency or forgetfulness, on the part of the court or of individuals concerned, of the formal subscription of the Confession, was not peculiar to the minister of Portmoak. When the list of subscribers was examined on Sept. 21, 1721, similar omissions were found, less or more, to attach to other *five* ministers of the same Presbytery. On this point we have only further to state, that after the lapse of several years, and, probably, in consequence of mutual explanations, Mr. Erskine's subscription was actually given in the presence of the Presbytery ; for a minute, dated March 19, 1730, contains the following sentence : “ This day Mr. Erskine subscribed the Confession of Faith and Formula.”

Another circumstance was turned to his reproach. With a design, as it should seem, to load him at once with the double charge of contempt for the authority of the king, and for the doctrines and decisions of the Church, his Reverend accuser informed the Commission of Assembly 1725, that he had neglected to observe some of the Fasts and Thanksgivings appointed by government, and had judicially adhered to a representation on this subject laid before the Synod of Fife by the Rev. Mr. Hogg. The fact is, that Mr. Hogg and he, with some other members of that Synod, entertained conscientious scruples relative to such appointments, when the Church of Scotland was required by

royal proclamation to observe a Fast or Thanksgiving on "the superstitious fast and feast-days mentioned in the Calendar of the Church of England." They could not keep those appointments, they thought, without "incurring the guilt of countenancing the Church of England, in her symbolizing with the idolatrous Church of Rome in the observation of holidays;" and, at the same time, they were not without apprehensions that such coincidences were intended by some of the English bishops, who were members of the Privy Council, as a means of gradually preparing the people of Scotland for submission to the yoke of ceremonies practised in the English Church. Mr. Erskine admits, that for these reasons, and "to avoid offences,"—when a public Thanksgiving was ordered to be held on Thursday, April 22, 1723, that Thursday being St. Mark's day, and the only feast-day in the whole month, he had called his parishioners to hold the Thanksgiving on the Wednesday immediately preceding instead of the Thursday. He rebuts the charge of disloyalty, however, in the following terms:

"I pray daily for his majesty by name. I did it under the very nose of the Pretender and his adherents in the time of the late rebellion, and gave greater instances of my loyalty at that time to his present Majesty than some others, who now, in a time of peace, are ready to charge me with disloyalty."—"To conclude this point," he adds, "there was never a Fast or Thanksgiving appointed by the Judicatories of this Church these twenty-three years since I was a minister, but I have observed them as punctually as any Brother in the Church, and I resolve to do so still. And as for those appointed by civil authority, if they be appointed

without distinction of days, or confining us in Scotland to the Fast and Feast-days of the Church of England ; or if they would but appoint a Fast-day upon one of their Feast-days, by which we may know there is no design in the case, it is my resolution to observe them also : it being my stated principle, that the State as well as the Church may appoint Fasts and Thanksgivings for just and necessary causes ; and that the power of the one is not at all privative of the other ;—although indeed it were most eligible that both Church and State should jointly concur in matters of that kind.”*

Whether this bold defender of evangelical doctrine were attacked openly or under a disguise, he was prepared to sustain the assault with manly and Christian resolution. During the sitting of the General Assembly in May 1726, an anonymous pamphlet appeared, entitled “ Marrow Chicaning Displayed ;” the object of which was to expose him to ridicule and contempt, by false allegations and gross abuse. To frustrate, in some degree, its mischievous design, he caused a short “ Advertisement” to be printed and affixed to the cross of Edinburgh, the gates of the Assembly-house, and other public places, challenging the author of that scurrilous production to come forth from his hiding-place and answer for himself, if he could dare to set his face to the gross misrepresentations and bitter invectives it contained. Alluding also to this dastardly attack on his character, he thus expresses himself in a Preface to one of his sermons :

“ The world cannot miss to see that this author’s

* Apol. Pref. pp. xxii, xxvii.

performance looks like the last effort of a desperate cause, founded upon the old Machiavelian principle, 'Reproach boldly, and something will stick.' . . . When I joined with my Representing Brethren in lifting up the banner of truth, I studied, through grace, to lay my ministry, my name, and worldly all, at the Lord's feet, accounting for the worst that either hell or earth could do me on that head; and, therefore, such blasts of calumny are no surprise to me. I did indeed enjoy something of a calm, while that worthy servant of Christ, Mr. James Bathgate, lived, the flood of reproach having run principally against him in these bounds; but no sooner was he called off the stage, but I found the storm breaking on me. I do own, since that time the archers have shot at me, and grieved me, and perhaps wounded my character with some. But I do rejoice that the bow of divine truth abides in its strength; I do believe that it shall abide so, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, even though some who own it may be separated from their brethren, and held for signs and wonders in Israel. To suffer reproach for the cause of Christ and his truth, I reckon not only an ornament but a treasure; and the author of the above pamphlet has done me, I conceive, a particular honour in directing his calumnious letter to me; and I do bind every scoff and calumny in it as a chain of gold about me—glorying that I, in particular, am accounted worthy to suffer reproach in so glorious a cause; whatever he, or others, actuated with the same spirit, may think of it."*

To discuss the various questions contested in the

* Gospel-Truth, pp. 55, 56.

Marrow Controversy, or to dwell largely on the reflexions which it naturally suggests, would be equally foreign to our present design. Before leaving this subject, however, we may briefly remark that, in the whole history of the Church, few instances have occurred, in which a dispute on doctrinal points has been either conducted with greater heat and violence, or more palpably over-ruled for salutary purposes. Mrs. Balderston, in an entry of her Diary, dated May 21, 1722, thus alludes to the extraordinary warmth which then characterized the debates of the Assembly. "Such a storm of hail, fire, thunder, none could remember. Indeed, there was a *mighty storm in the Assembly* that day." This controversy, however, which occasioned those vehement and stormy discussions, led many to a careful study of the points at issue, and has been eminently subservient to the illustration, preservation, and spread of evangelical truth.

The same ardent attachment to the peculiar doctrines of divine revelation, which the subject of these memoirs displayed, in reference to the contest that originated in the condemnation of the Marrow, was discovered on occasion of the controversy relating to the proper DIVINITY OF CHRIST. Several years before any minister of the Church of Scotland was accused of denying this capital article of the Christian faith, it had been openly impugned in England and Ireland. The heresy commenced in England. The discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, with the writings of Des Cartes and Locke, had then effected an astonishing revolution in the regions of philosophy and science. A spirit of free inquiry being thus excited, some theologians indulged in

bold speculations on the most sacred topics ; and forgetting that, when the divine origin of Scripture is established, it belongs to man to acquiesce without gainsaying in its most mysterious and incomprehensible doctrines, they proceeded to constitute their own erring reason the supreme judge of truth, and to bring every religious principle to its bar, to be received or rejected according to its sovereign decision. Owing to this daring speculative spirit, added to a false candour and liberality of sentiment, which many professed Christians seemed proud to express, the Arian tenets were not only revived, but powerfully patronised, and extensively propagated. By means of the writings of Professor Whiston, of Cambridge, and Dr. Samuel Clarke, who broached these errors during the reign of Queen Anne, Arianism was widely disseminated, not only in the English Establishment, but among the Dissenters. The zeal with which it was maintained, or the indulgence it met with, in various Academies where young men received an education for the ministry,—in particular, the Academy at Exeter, under the superintendence of Haller—served greatly to extend the mischief. The Rev. Thomas Bradbury and others exerted themselves zealously to stem the torrent of defection ; but their laudable efforts, though not entirely fruitless, were attended only with partial success.

The mournful intelligence of the rapid diffusion of this pernicious error in England pressed heavily on the minds of faithful ministers in Scotland, and created strong apprehensions of the danger to which their own church was exposed from the same spreading leaven. The following letter from Mr. Erskine to a friend in Edinburgh, written shortly after looking into some of

the Arian publications which had come in his way, is a valuable specimen of this pious concern. It is contained in his Diary, under date February 2, 1721 :

“ *At this present time I have written a Letter to Mr. George Andrew, merchant in the Bow, Edinburgh, the tenor whereof follows :*

“ Dear Sir,

“ This comes to salute you, your spouse, and children—wishing much of the Father’s love, of the Son’s grace, and of the Spirit’s comforts may be upon you and yours, whereby you may be made to flourish like the palm tree ; concerning which some tell us that *sub pondere crescit*. *

“ We cannot expect exemption from trials while in this Bochim ; but it is little the hazard, if by the sap and fatness of the good olive, we be made to grow and thrive under them. For my own part, I have nothing good to say of myself, being a very compound of sin and misery. I may set to my seal to that of the Apostle, ‘ In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.’ But though I can say nothing that is good of myself, I can say nothing but what is good of our wonderful Immanuel. He is always like a new Christ, every time he appears ; and therefore this will always be a new song, ‘ Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.’

“ I have had occasion of late to read some of the blasphemous pamphlets of the upstart Arians in England, denying, with the greatest air of assurance, the true and proper Deity of the Son of God, and bringing him, in effect, among the ranks of creatures, and pre-

* It grows under a weight.

tending to support all they say with Scripture. I was at first struck with horror when I read them; and you may be sure the tempter, who had the impudence to say to himself. ‘If thou be the Son of God——,’ would not want the confidence to say to me, ‘What if it be as Arians say, that he is not truly God, co-equal with the Father?’ I saw plainly that the heresy struck at the very vitals of Christianity, and sapped the very foundation of any comfort I have had in the discoveries which the Lord has given me of the excellency of the Redeemer’s person. But blessed be his name he relieved me by telling me, and I hope discovering to me, that ‘all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in him;’ and that the blessed Child that is born unto us is ‘the Mighty God,’ and therefore the same in substance, and equal in power and glory with the Father; and that ‘he that hath seen the Son, hath seen the Father also;’ he being ‘the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.’ I am so fully satisfied, in a word, anent the eternal Deity of our glorious Redeemer and his equality and one-ness with his Father, that I dare hazard my share in heaven upon the truth of it. Whatsoever clouds and mists may arise out of the bottomless pit, to obscure the glory of the worthy Lamb of God, shall in the issue serve only as a foil to make his beauty shine with the greater lustre, like the sun breaking out from under a cloud. He shall be the head-stone of the corner, however he be disparaged by some builders in our day. His cause shall stand against the utmost efforts of the gates of hell; and therefore let us join in a hallelujah to him, saying, ‘The Lord liveth, blessed be my rock; let the God of my salvation be exalted.’——

Actuated by holy zeal for the truth, he did not deem

it sufficient thus to express his sentiments and feelings in private correspondence with his friends, but used his humble endeavours to persuade the General Assembly to emit a seasonable warning against the Arian error. It very naturally occurred to him that a measure of this description might conduce, by the Divine blessing, to check the progress of the heresy, and to strengthen the hands of those esteemed brethren in England and Ireland, who were nobly contending for the truth in opposition to its enemies around them. To every one that admires the glory of the Divine Saviour, that feels the importance of an atonement for sin possessing unbounded value and efficacy, or who at all “ knows the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” the following extract from the Records of the Session of Portmoak can hardly fail to appear, at least in its spirit and tenor, highly creditable to that Session, and to its Moderator, by whom, most probably, the overture was prepared and proposed :

“ Overture anent the Supreme Deity of our Redeemer.

“ *Portmoak, March 1725.* Several members of Session having proposed that a plain and open Testimony should be given by this church against the Arian heresy, which is so pernicious, and which, like a raging pestilence, has infected many of all ranks in our neighbouring nations, whereby the Supreme Deity of our blessed Redeemer and his co-equality with the Father are called in question,—the Session, taking this into consideration, and considering that they are one of the radical judicatories of this Church, met and constituted in the name and by the authority of the Eternal Son of God, our alone Head and King ; and judging that they were

obliged, for their own exoneration before God and their own consciences to cherish the above motion, in as far as they can, and to transmit it as an Overture to the superior judicatories of this Church till it come to the National Assembly, that so a banner may be lifted up and displayed by the Church of Scotland in opposition to these pretended Protestants in neighbouring nations, who by this damnable heresy are attempting to take away the bright jewel of our Redeemer's crown, and to bring him, even as to his divine nature, in among the ranks of created beings ; whereby his glory is obscured, and the foundation of our holy religion, and of the eternal comfort and salvation of those who believe in him, is overturned. Although we hope there are none in our national Church as yet tainted with this abominable heresy, yet considering that, like a spreading gangrene, it has for some years been raging among our neighbours, and that all imaginable precaution ought to be used for preventing the contagion from breaking in among us ; which we have the more reason to fear, that so many of our nobility and gentry are resorting to and residing in London, where that heresy has been broached and propagated. As also considering that many who are of the Presbyterian persuasion in England and Ireland are reported to be tainted therewith, whom we are obliged by the law of charity to reprove that we may not suffer sin upon them, and may not be partakers of their sin.— And considering that by the Solemn League, on which we look as binding on us, we are obliged to endeavour their reformation as much as in us lies ; and that if we in this Church stand neutral when there is such an open attack upon our Redeemer's crown, he may be

provoked to suffer the same heresy to break in like an inundation on us also.—Considering also that it has been the peculiar glory of this Church of Scotland to contend even unto blood for the royalties of the King of Zion, we are very hopeful she will not now sit silent, when the crown is in a manner plucked from his head. And who knows but the great God our Saviour may honour this Church to be ‘terrible as an army with banners’ to the enemies of his supreme and eternal Deity, when she attempts to lift up a banner for him. And we are hopeful that our worthy and orthodox brethren in these neighbouring nations, who are valiant for the truth, and contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, shall have their hearts and hands animated and strengthened, when they see this our Church coming in as an auxiliary to ‘the help of the Lord against the mighty.’ That same God who crowned Athanasius, in the primitive ages, when standing for the supreme Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the whole world turned Arian, will, we hope, countenance a Testimony from this Church for suppressing that old condemned heresy, lately raked out of hell.

“Upon all these considerations, we do transmit the consideration of this important and weighty affair to the Reverend Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, earnestly entreating them to move it to the next Synod, in order to be transmitted to the National Assembly, for the end foresaid.”

The minute of Kirkcaldy Presbytery, dated March 18, 1725, contains a short and general notice of some communication from Portmoak, the consideration of which was deferred. Probably it was just this Overture regarding the Deity of Christ, agreed to by the

Session of that parish in the same month. We have not discovered, however, any subsequent allusion to it in the Records of Presbytery; nor are we aware that any such act, as the said Overture contemplated, was ever passed by the General Assembly, previous to the Act 1730 for preventing the spread of error, which had not only been so long deferred, but was expressed in so vague and general terms, that it was far from giving satisfaction to the zealous friends of the truth.

Mean time, soon after the date of the Overture from Portmoak, the whole Church was agitated by reports respecting the appearance of Arian doctrine in the Theological chair of the University of Glasgow, and by the process commenced by "that great man," as Boston calls him, Mr. JAMES WEBSTER of Edinburgh, against the Rev. JOHN SIMSON, on that ground. More than ten years before, the same Mr. Simson, who had long been Professor of Theology in that University, was judicially accused by Mr. Webster of teaching several erroneous principles.* But though the libel was fully proved, and though most of its articles were admitted by the Professor himself in his answers, the Assembly were satisfied with declaring " 'that some of his opinions were not evidently founded in the word of God, nor necessary to be taught in Divinity,' and pro-

* "This was the noted case," says Mr. Crichton, "of Mr. John Simpson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, who was accused of teaching and preaching heretical doctrines, for which, by appointment of the Synod of Lothian, he was libelled by Mr. James Webster." *Life and Diary of Col. Blackader*, ch. xx. This appointment of the Synod of Lothian was confirmed by the Assembly, 1714. See *Struth. Hist. of Scot.* vol. i. book 2, p. 206.

hibiting him him from publishing such sentiments in future.”*

Emboldened by this very gentle sentence, the Professor proceeded to entertain his students with doctrines still more flagrantly heretical. After complicated and tedious proceedings which occupied the attention of the judicatories for several years, it was found clearly proved, that he had denied the necessary existence and supreme Deity of Christ, and the numerical oneness of the Three Persons in the Godhead. In the year 1729, the General Assembly, after a discussion of eight days, came to a final decision on this important cause. Though a sentence of deposition was generally expected, and had been urged by the greater number of the Presbyteries, whose sentiments on the subject had been formally requested, Mr. Simson was not deposed, but merely suspended from teaching and preaching, and thus permitted to enjoy both the privileges of church communion and the emoluments of his office, which accordingly he retained till the year 1744, when he was removed by death.

Mr. Boston of Ettrick having, with singular intrepidity, dissented from this lenient sentence, Mr. Erskine, though not then a member of Assembly, expressed his cordial approbation of the dissent. He only regretted that his learned and godly friend was prevailed with not to insist on his dissent being entered on the records of the court, for the honour of Christ and the instruction of posterity. He blamed himself too for a similar

* Testimony of the Unit. Assoc. Syn. Part i. ch. 3. See also A Testimony to the Truths of Christ by the Asso. Syn. of Original Seceders, part i. sect. 8.

omission. At a meeting of the Associate Presbytery held at Culfargie, July 28, 1736, the four Brethren deemed it incumbent on them to make a solemn confession of their faults to one another with reference to the defects of Christian courage which had attached to their conduct respectively on occasion of the unexpected leniency characterizing the termination of that process. After an ample account of the candid acknowledgment of culpable remissness made by Mr. Moncrieff of Abernethy, and the brotherly admonition consequently administered, the Presbytery's minute of that date contains the following statement :

“ Mr. Erskine acknowledged that although he adhered unto the protestation that was offered against the foresaid decision by the late Rev. Mr. Thomas Boston, yet that it was his sin, that he did not urge the marking of it, when it was insisted upon. The Presbytery, taking the above acknowledgment into their consideration, agreed to admonish, exhort, and encourage their brother to more dependence upon, and steadfastness in the cause and testimony of the Lord in time to come ; which was done accordingly.”*

One of his sermons, in manuscript, includes an explicit acknowledgment to the same effect ; and his published discourses afford sufficient evidence that he gave solemn and repeated warnings to his hearers, to beware lest any man rob them of the precious doctrine of the Saviour's Divinity.†

* Extracted from the original Record of the Assoc. Presb. written by the Rev. James Fisher, their Clerk.

† See for example the first inference in the sermon on Exod. xx. 2, 3, and the first inference in the discourse on Isa. lxiii. 4.

Were we to adopt the lax notions held by many in the present age, we should consider, we are well aware, every bold appearance in behalf of even the most essential truths of Christianity as calculated, not to heighten, but to lower the character of any man; not excepting those, who, by their office, are “set for the defence of the Gospel.” The same writers who can style the venerable Mr. Webster an “enthusiast” and a “zealous inquisitor” for his active efforts to give a check to pernicious error, and who can affirm that “he persecuted Mr. Simpson with the most unrelenting severity,” must no doubt despise the zeal discovered by Mr. Erskine and other evangelical ministers, and by the majority of the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland, in the same cause. The contempt of such authors, however, is a real honour to those on whose memory it is thrown.

Let the genuine philosopher judge whether it be an inconsiderable mistake, even in the eye of reason, to degrade to the rank of dependent creatures a person possessing eternal godhead, and entitled to the highest Divine honours. Let the candid reader of the Scriptures say, if it is of small moment to ascertain whether that great personage, whose character and work it is the principal object of that inestimable volume to exhibit, be represented by the Prophets and Apostles, and by the Messiah himself, as nothing higher than a created intelligence, or as truly “God manifest in flesh.” Let the serious inquirer, who feels the importance of eternity, calmly determine the question, whether his immortal soul may be entrusted, through life and at death, to an individual who is merely a most

excellent man or a glorious angel; or whether this sacred deposit can be safely committed only to one who is in reality "the mighty God," and whose name is "Jehovah our Righteousness." Let the conscientious worshipper decide how far it accords with propriety and consistency, that those who deem it a very important and a necessary duty to ascribe Divine honours to Christ, and those who regard the ascription of such honours to him as an act of downright idolatry, should belong to the same church, and unite in the same devotional engagements. Let "all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" declare, if their love and veneration for the Saviour can permit them to countenance the efforts of the men who tear the crown of divine glory from his head, and cast it to the dust. Let the man of common integrity, in fine, determine whether the emoluments and honours of any church should be lavished on persons who either openly or covertly assail the leading doctrines by which that church is distinguished, and which its members have solemnly vowed to maintain.

The policy by which civil rights and privileges are withheld from any class of society, purely on the ground of their sentiments in religion, may be questionable, or iniquitous and absurd. But in whatever light that policy be viewed, the Churches of Christ are bound by the highest authority to keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus, and to cut off from their communion those by whom gross heresies are openly and pertinaciously maintained; and it is incumbent on every individual Christian to contend earnestly for the truth, and to discountenance those by

whom it is opposed. "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine," says that affectionate disciple whom Jesus loved, "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds." 3d John 10, 11.

CHAPTER VI.

Personal and domestic afflictions at Portmoak—Death of three sons, and of a sister—Mr. Erskine himself seized with a dangerous fever—Improvement of trials, and their happy fruits—Death of the Rev. Mr. Plenderleath—Affliction, death, and character of Mrs. Erskine—Brother Ralph's sympathy—Decease of Mr. Balderston—Letters to Mrs. Balderston—Death of one daughter, and recovery of another—Inscription on Mrs. Erskine's tomb.

THE subjects which now claim our attention, though more private in their character than those of the two chapters immediately preceding, will be regarded with equal interest by the Christian reader. With whatever satisfaction and respect we behold the good minister of Christ proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation in the pulpit, or vindicating the cause of injured truth "among assembled elders," it is still more pleasing to see him, in the bosom of his family, exemplifying the amiable virtues of domestic life. The zeal and magnanimity displayed on the conspicuous arena of ecclesiastical controversy may justly entitle him to veneration and gratitude ; but the meek submission with which he endures the visitations most agonizing to the heart of a husband and a parent, and the pious solicitude with which he improves every personal and family affliction as a means of increasing at once his own spiritual im-

provement and his public usefulness, give him a firmer hold of our tender and affectionate regard.

His own record enables us not only to detail some remarkable vicissitudes which occurred in his family during his ministry at Portmoak, but also to exhibit authentic and edifying memorials of their blessed effects on his temper and conduct.

In a former part of this work we had occasion briefly to notice a dangerous fever he was seized with shortly after his settlement at Portmoak, and previous to the momentous change which took place in his views and character.* In the year 1711, he was afflicted with another serious, though somewhat lingering, illness. But, far from discovering the same insensibility which he represents as characterizing the state of his mind under that violent distemper, he now felt a deep concern respecting his destiny in the eternal world, and was anxious to possess a well-founded hope of salvation.

“*P. Feb. 21, 1711, about 3 o'clock P. M.* I am at this time in great perplexity about the Lord's hiding. I have been ill two months. My body is brought low, and I am beginning to think of my latter end as approaching. But oh! how shall I look death in the face, if the Lord do not give me his presence in the dark valley. I am afraid that matters are not right with me; but when I begin to look back on what has formerly passed between Him and my soul, I would *fain* entertain hopes that I have some of his love-tokens with me. But will the Lord forget to be gracious?

* Ch. ii. pp. 85, 86.

Will he in anger shut up his tender mercy? O that he would again return to me!"

Soon after the date of this entry, he was mercifully recovered from his threatening illness; for, when a few weeks had elapsed, he assisted the Rev. Mr. Grier, of Edinburgh, in administering the Lord's Supper. In the year 1713, however, he not merely experienced a renewal of personal infirmities, but was severely tried by the sore afflictions, and the lamented deaths, of a great proportion of his children. Both measles and small-pox entered the family; and no less than three dear sons were torn from the embraces of their affectionate parents—RALPH, his fourth son, on the 23d April, in the 2d year of his age; HENRY, the eldest, June 8th, in his 9th year; and ALEXANDER, the second son, on the 20th of the same month, at the age of five.

The following entries of his Diary, written on these mournful occasions, whilst they abundantly indicate the intensity of his natural and sanctified feelings as a father, are strongly expressive of Christian resignation and hope, and manifest the salutary effects of the rod upon his heart. To parents who have themselves experienced similar anguish in beholding the painful diseases and premature deaths of their lovely babes, they can hardly fail to prove particularly interesting and beneficial.

"*April 27, 1713, being Monday.* My dear, sweet, and pleasant child, Ralph, died on Thursday, last week, about a quarter after 7 in the morning. His death was very grievous and affecting to my wife and me; but good is the will of the Lord. He takes and gives; blessed be the name of the Lord. My dear child died

of the measles, which did appear to come fully out ; but no sooner were they at the height, but they did strike in again to his heart. That which I think memorable about his death is,—1. The affecting trouble my dear babe was brought into. For about twenty-four hours before he died, he was exceedingly tortured with flatulency in his stomach. . . . 2. Having sent off my servant to Kirkaldy, as he returned, he came in by Mr. Currie's house about 8 P. M. and there Mr. *John Frew*, being informed of the providence in my family, immediately came off, and stayed with me all that night. His company was most refreshing and comfortable to me and my wife. Mr. Frew and each of us prayed three or four times before the child died ; my dear friend, Mr. Frew, was wonderfully helped to pray for the child. 3. About half an hour before the child's breath went out, he felt perfectly calm, and was relieved from the sore tossings he had, and being laid down on his back in the cradle, his eye appeared quick and lively, his countenance serene and pleasant. He looked round upon the company with his eyes, sometimes casting them up towards heaven, as if nothing had ailed him. An air of heaven and glory appeared in his very face, and his countenance, in a manner, thus addressed the spectators : ' Now farewell father and mother, farewell brother and sisters, farewell friends and spectators ; now I am at ease, I behold glorious Christ, glorious angels, receiving me into their abodes of joy. Farewell weary world ; welcome Christ, welcome heaven, welcome angels, welcome the spirits of just men made perfect.' His countenance invited all that beheld him to follow him to glory, and to prepare for that inheritance he was going to. 4. After his breath was

gone and his body swathed, the company having taken a little refreshment, I was called to return thanks, which I did ; but, towards the end, when I came to take notice of the present providence, that God had plucked one of the sweet flowers of the family, my heart burst out into tears, so that I was able to go no further. 5. I find that since the death of the child, my soul has been more quickened in the way of duty than formerly, more lively in prayer, more resolute to follow the Lord, and to cleave to him. I find that I needed this spur of affliction to excite me to my duty ; and it has made me more importunate with God on behalf of my poor child Henry who is a-dying, these four or five months, of a decay."

"*July 1, 1713.* Since the last time I have here marked, I have been sadly, *sadly* afflicted with the loss of other two pleasant children. My dear child, Henry Erskine, my first-born, having died by the will of God, June 8th, being Monday, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon—about eight years of age. He took his disease with the measles, about half a year ago, in Dunfermline, which did cast him into a decay ; and having brought him home, the small-pox came into the family, which carried him off about two or three days after the height. He was a blooming, pleasant, child ; and, according to his age, had an excellent capacity, was profiting exceedingly in his learning, and knew many of the fundamentals of religion above many of his age. While he lay on his sick-bed, I frequently conversed with him about the affairs of his soul ; and he gave me great satisfaction by expressing a desire for Christ, and a desire to be with him rather than with father and mother, and friends and relations, here in this world.

And that same day that he died, he frequently desired me to pray with him, and would frequently cry out, when he saw me; ‘O! father, father, pray, pray, pray for me!’ And I thought it observable that, although all the day he died, he was almost continually raving; yet, about half an hour before his death, having desired me to pray, he lay perfectly calm and silent during the whole time of prayer. All these things I take as grounds of hope that my sweet Henry is now praising, and triumphing with Christ in glory. Both my sister, Mrs. Balderston, and *Catharine Lockhart*, another Christian, living about two miles from this, told me that they got great assurances of his life; which I, in charity, think has been of his eternal life, though they had understood it of a temporal.

“Upon the 20th day of June, being Saturday, about 4 in the morning, the Lord was pleased to take away from me another pleasant pledge, a child of five years of age, his name Alexander. My affections were exceedingly knit to him, and I was comforting myself in having him, after his brother Henry’s death; but it seems the Lord will not allow me to settle my affections on any thing here below. I cannot express the grief of my heart for the loss of this child, the other two strokes being so late.—I thought I got faith exercised on his behalf upon that word of Christ, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ The Lord inclined my heart to bring my sweet child unto him, and I could not allow myself to doubt but he would accept of him. The Lord make me content with his dispensations, and give me the sanctified use of these repeated breaches

that he has made upon my poor family. I hope to be gathered unto Christ with my little ones ere long. I have had a sore parting ; but they and I, I hope, shall have a joyful meeting. They will welcome me to those mansions of glory above ; and they and I, with all the ransomed on Mount Zion, will join in an eternal hymn and hallelujah of praise unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. O to be ready and meet for that inheritance. O to have sanctification perfected, that I may be fit for the work which my pleasant babes are now employed in. If I get the eternal Son of God into my heart, I will not be at a loss for my three sons that are gone. O Lord, let me find upmaking in thyself. I am content to be bereaved of all I have in the world, if thou wilt give me thyself as my sure portion. I will wait for the Lord, and he will strengthen my heart. I dare not deny that he has given secret supporting grace ; otherwise these deep waters had come into my soul, and utterly overwhelmed me."

A few months after the death of his three dear boys, he lost another relative to whom he was tenderly attached—a sister, who had resided for some time at Dunfermline with her brother Ralph, and who died there in the month of October. The genuine fraternal affection and sympathy felt by the two brothers towards a dying sister, and their assiduous care to promote her eternal welfare, are apparent in the following artless and affecting detail.

"*P. Thursday, Oct. 8, 1713, about 6 P. M.* Having been waiting on the Synod [probably at Cupar] last

week, my brother Ralph and I were sent for by express, on Wednesday, to see my dear sister ——,* who, having been ill, fell worse that day, which made my mother send for us. Accordingly, we came and found her very ill. I stayed with her at Dunfermline from Wednesday till Saturday, last week, during which time I had several conversations with her about soul-matters. I endeavoured to recommend Christ to her, and the way of salvation through him; to which she seemed to give a very cheerful and willing consent, expressing a great and earnest longing after a discovery of the covenant by the Spirit of the Lord, which she said she much needed."

Mr. Erskine then gives an account of his coming home on the Saturday, and engaging, at Mr. Wardrope's request, who was indisposed, to preach at Ballingry instead of Portmoak. On Sabbath morning he received a letter, informing him that his sister was apparently about to expire; but resolved to fulfil his engagement at Ballingry. Having stated the grounds of this resolution, he thus proceeds:—"After sermon was over, my wife and I went down to Dunfermline that same day. It pleased the Lord that we found her alive, though very weak; for she died not till Monday this week, a quarter after 10 o'clock. She kept her senses and judgment till, I think, about a quarter of an hour before her death, so that I had the satisfaction of conversing frequently with her. At my first coming she was much in the dark about her eternal state. I [now] asked if the Lord had yet given her a discovery

* The name is quite obliterated; but we think it was MARGARET.

of Christ, and of the covenant method of salvation ; she answered, that she thought she had got some discovery of it. My brother Ralph said, that if she had got a discovery, then surely Christ would be exceedingly precious to her ; to which she answered, ‘ O yes, yes, he is precious.’ She frequently expressed her love to Christ, and her high esteem of him, and desire after him ; and just about the time of her death, I was exhorting her to roll her soul over upon the merits of the exalted Redeemer, and asked if she was content to venture her eternal all upon him, and she answered, ‘ Yes, yes,’—which was all she was able to say ; and I observed her cast her eyes and hands up towards heaven. I have now ground to hope that she is with the Lord. My brother Ralph told me that he was helped to great importunity with God on her behalf, and I cannot but say the same. I was helped, I recollect, to plead the blessed ransom and propitiation on her behalf. God is willing on his part to save lost sinners, and has found a ransom for this very end. I could not, therefore, but believe that he would be gracious to her, seeing I was confident that she was willing, and declared her entire satisfaction with the method of salvation through a Redeemer. On this ground I build my hope that she is this day singing hallelujahs with the ransomed on Mount Zion. She was buried on Wednesday, the 7th of October, 1713, in the church-yard of Dunfermline, beside Mr. *David Ferguson* and Mr. *William Oliphant*, two honest gentlemen of that place ; and Mr. *John Gray*, minister of Orwell, who also died and was buried in that place.

“ But now as to the frame and disposition of my own soul during this sad dispensation—as I said already, I

got my soul, I thought, sometimes sweetly enlarged for my poor sister in distress. I found, particularly, a great melting of soul, at a time when my brother and I went alone, and prayed together on her behalf. Both he and I were very much touched with tenderness, accompanied with a pleading and wrestling spirit.—Her death was very weighty and affecting to me; yet it pleased the Lord to turn the edge of my thoughts and affections towards an endless eternity, which was approaching fast to myself——.”*

After having suffered so many painful bereavements in the course of one year, we need not wonder to find him cultivating a close familiarity with the last enemy; and apt to regard any considerable ailment he felt in his own earthly tabernacle as the harbinger of its speedy dissolution. It is gratifying, at the same time, to hear him, amid the humblest acknowledgments of personal unworthiness, repeatedly expressing a tranquil hope of future bliss, and occasionally rising to a triumphant expectation of meeting his beloved father, and his dear departed children, in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb.

“*Aug.* 12, 1713, between 6 and 7 P. M. I am beginning to think that my time here will not be long, in regard I feel the forerunners of death in this clay tabernacle, by the intermitting of my pulse; which I discovered first in the morning laying in my bed, but now more clearly and distinctly. Whereupon I did begin to think what I had to bear me through death—what I had to lean upon. I am very jealous of myself; but O

* The sequel of this entry has been quoted in Chap. ii. pp. 39, 90.

I would *fain* be in Christ, and build all my hopes on him. He has formerly, I think, drawn out my soul to him, though now he is hiding his face from me. But, I hope he will return, and that he will never, never, leave me nor forsake me—that he will be with me through the Jordan of death. I find, by looking back to my former experience, that I have been much in longing to be with Christ, to behold his glory. O that this may not be like Balaam, who desired to die the death of the righteous. But the Lord knows that my soul has been made to admire the person of Christ, and wonder at his excellency, as well as his purchase. It is his *person* I adore and accept of, and then I accept of all that he hath. O happy, if I were well over Jordan. It lightens my heart to think that he who was dead is alive, and lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death. This is the *sheet-anchor* of my soul, which is now drawing near to eternity.”

“*Jan. 10, Sabbath, 1714.* This morning my soul was exceedingly refreshed with the thoughts of my approaching dissolution, when I shall be guarded by angels into the place of blessedness, and ascend into God’s holy hill, where I shall meet with *my father, and my little children* that are gone before me, and all the ransomed on Mount Zion ; especially where I shall see Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant ; and God, the Judge of all. And oh ! these words of Job, ch. xix. 25, 26, were like marrow and fatness to my soul ; ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth ; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.’ My heart leaps within me at the thought of it, that these things are the evident truths of God, which are more firm than the foundations of the earth. I take this visit as a pledge

that he will be with me in the dark valley of death, and that he will be with me this day to help me to proclaim his praise to the congregation. O that I could commend him to the poor souls under my charge."

The year 1714, as well as the preceding, was a time of heavy affliction to Mr. Erskine and family. The Records of the Presbytery of Kirkaldy contain an allusion to their sufferings in the spring of that year. It is stated that, on Feb. 27th, a letter had been received from him "representing the sad circumstances of his family," which rendered it impossible for him to preach, according to appointment, at Burntisland, on the last Sabbath of that month. It is particularly mentioned in the Diary, that Ebenezer, his only surviving son, was alarmingly ill of a fever. His feelings and exercises under this visitation are amply described. Let the following extract suffice for a specimen :

"*P. Friday, January 29, 1714, between 7 and 8 P. M.* My pleasant child, Ebenezer, is at this moment laying in the fever, having taken it on Wednesday last. I have been entreating the Lord for him; and the answer I have got is a discovery of God and his sovereignty, which fills me with dread and stops my mouth, that I dare not quarrel, whatever be the issue. But glory to his name that along with this, that word came — 'I am thy God, and the God of thy seed; the promise is unto you, and to your children.' I have got also this night some admiring views of the blessed Jesus. Oh! he is precious, precious to me, and a sight of him lightens my heart. Though I have still some doubts and hesitation anent my claim to him because of the woful prevalency of unbelief, my soul, I

think, adheres and cleaves to him like the weak ivy to the strong oak —.

“ About 1 o’clock in the morning, I was called down to see my poor child, who, they were thinking, would not live long. I went down and prayed for him; and after I came up, I went to pray to God on his behalf. I begged of the Lord that he would spare him if it was his holy pleasure; but if he intended to take him away, that he would show a token for good anent his soul’s well-being. After I had lain down, that word presented itself to me with a different gloss from any that ever I thought on before—‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ I thought, while my heart was clasping and gripping, the Lord, as it were, in a condescending way, bade me loose my grips, and suffer this little child also to come to him, for of such is the kingdom of heaven—‘for I have use for him in my heavenly kingdom.’ Whereupon my soul sweetly echoed back again, ‘Lord, if thou hast use for him in thy heavenly kingdom, I quit him with more than a thousand goodwills; for he is thine own, and why shouldst thou not have thine own? It is amazing condescension in thee, to ask this of me, to suffer him to go home to thee. That which yet rendered it the more sweet was Rom. viii. 32, ‘He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.’ Has God given *his only Son* out of love to the like of me; and shall not I cheerfully give *my only son* to him, when he calls for him, or has use for him in heaven? Meditation on these things was so sweet that my heart, I thought, was calmed and quieted, whatever should be the event. I fully quit my child to the Lord, to dispose of him.”

Young Ebenezer, nevertheless, was mercifully relieved from his fever, as well as wonderfully preserved, when, three months after his recovery, a cow tossed him on her horns.* The father of the family, however, was also seized with this contagious disorder. In the following passage of his Diary, he records the impressions he felt under God's correcting hand, enumerates the various arguments against impatience which he urged on his own mind, and specifies the dutiful resolutions he formed:

“ *P. March 29, 1714.* On Monday the —— day of this month I took the fever, from which, blessed be the Lord, I am now in a hopeful way of recovery. For the first two days of my fever, I remember, I was in great darkness, and could not see the Lord, or rejoice in him, as sometimes I could have done. Even in the dark, however, I was helped, in some measure, to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay myself on my God. He helped me to look to, and roll myself upon, the righteousness of Christ, as the only ground of my justification and acquittance before the bar of a holy and righteous God, before which I was not sure but I might shortly appear. After these two days were past, though I began to rove, yet the Lord was pleased to manifest himself to me in his awful power and majesty. I thought I beheld him working wonders before me, as in the land of Egypt—rending rocks, levelling mountains, making crooked things straight, filling up vallies, doing great things to me; yea, wonders without number. Yet I was not in the least terrified at the sight, because I thought I saw him to be my God, my Fa-

* This remarkable escape has been mentioned pp. 155, 156.

ther, reconciled to me in Christ, and doing all these things with a design to form suitable conceptions and impressions of himself in my soul. Accordingly I was filled with adoring thoughts of his excellent majesty, and an awful regard to his commands, so that I thought I would rather study to please God and obey him, than all the men in the world, for I saw all the kings, princes, potentates, and parliaments in the world to be as nothing, yea, less than nothing, before him.

“ I remember also, that in the extremity of my bodily sickness, I was beginning to turn fretful and impatient; but several things were presented to my consideration, which did not only still and quiet me, but made me burst out in tears, such as, 1. The consideration of the absolute sovereignty and dominion of the great God, to whom I was but as the pot-sherd in the hand of the potter, whom he might make and break in pieces, as he pleases. What am I that I should say unto him, What dost thou? 2. The consideration of the justice and equity of God, compared with my own deservings. I remembered that I was a sinner, and a great sinner; that I had violated the whole law, and that the least of all my sins, which were innumerable, laid me open to the curse, and made me liable to everlasting torments in hell; and therefore I had little reason to repine, since it was only a temporal trouble that I was enduring. 3. The consideration of what Christ suffered, who was the Only begotten Son of God, personally innocent, and only *imputatively* guilty; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him and to put him to grief. If these things were done in the green tree, what should be done in the dry? I had little reason to complain, since my sufferings and troubles came far short of his. 4.

The consideration that this light affliction would soon come to an end, and should work for me a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory: for in the midst of my trouble, I remember, I still had hope that if I lived, I should triumph with God's inheritance on earth, and if I died, I should triumph and sing hallelujahs with the redeemed company that are around the throne. These considerations, I say, stilled and quieted my spirit; and my heart melted to think that I should be guilty of repining against the hand of a kind and gracious Father, who was correcting me for my good; and of whose love I have had so many proofs and repeated experiences.

“I remember also that in the time of my fever, I came under solemn engagements that, if the Lord should spare me and recover me to wonted health, I would be more watchful against sin than ever, particularly the sin I am most inclined to, and that, through the assistance of his grace, I would have a universal respect to all his commandments. I felt so much of the sweetness of Christ, that I thought, if ever the Lord recovered me, I would have more than ever to say to his commendation; I would preach him with more vigour and liveliness than ever to my congregation; I would be more active than ever to commend him to poor souls—and that not only by public preaching but by private conversation; and that on all occasions I would speak to his praise.”

Those afflictive dispensations which prove a salutary discipline to all Christians, are peculiarly profitable, as appears from the above extracts, to them who serve at the altar. The blessed experience this faithful pastor had, in very trying circumstances, of the importance

and value of the Gospel, gave a new impulse to his zeal in recommending its precious doctrines and promises to others ; and he stood prepared to “ comfort those that were in trouble, with the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God.” His parishioners tenderly sympathized with him under his repeated and heavy distresses ; and at the same time they observed with pleasure that these trials were succeeded by an increased fervency in enforcing personal religion, and in making a close application of the truth to the conscience and heart, and infused fresh energy into all his efforts on behalf of immortal souls.* About this period too, the good fruits of his ministry became more visible and striking than they had previously been.†

To return to his own details.—The bitter cup assigned to him in the year 1714 was not yet exhausted. Several months after his own recovery from fever, his eldest daughter was taken ill of the same distemper at Kirkaldy. The following entry shows the solicitude he felt, and the earnestness and animating hope with which he presented his requests on her behalf :

“ *P. August 18, 1714.* I got word yesterday that my daughter JEAN is laying in a fever in Kirkaldy. The Lord be gracious to her. I desire to give her to the Lord, and according to his command, to bring her to him, who, I hope, is my God, and who will also, according to his promise, be the God of my seed.—Christ’s condescension towards the nobleman of Capernaum, who entreated him on behalf of his child that was dying, furnished me with an argument on behalf of my little daughter. He has a regard to the poor as

* Portmoak MS.

† See chap. iv. p. 196.

well as the rich and noble ; and therefore I may go to him for my child as well as this man did, for he is as willing and ready to help now, as he was then. This gave me encouragement to pray that the Lord Jesus would heal her soul ; that he would lay his hand on her and bless her ; that he would break in upon her heart, and sanctify this affliction ; that, if it were his will, he would spare her ; and that, if she died, he would take her to himself. Only allow some comfortable evidence to parents of a gracious change, and of love to Christ. Blessed be his name, who allows me to plead on her behalf, and helps in some measure to believe that he will hear."

His prayers for this beloved daughter were graciously heard. After the lapse of about four weeks, she was so far restored that on September 22, he brought her home from Kirkaldy, and both in his closet and family rendered to the Lord the Healer, the tribute of fervent gratitude on her account.*

Several subsequent entries, however, which it is unnecessary to quote, give evidence that his tender recollections of his three dear boys, whose remains he had committed to the dust, were often revived ; and that his thoughts and affections were habitually fixed on that world of perfect bliss, where he expected shortly to meet them.

Those longings after immortality were inflamed not only by the repeated breaches in his own house, but by the departure of Christian friends, and in particular, of ministers who stood high in his esteem. What a warm

* Comp. chap. iii. pp. 156, 157.

regard he cherished for the Rev. Mr. PLENDERLEATH of *Saline*, and how greatly he was moved by conflicting emotions of grief and joy on occasion of his death, will sufficiently appear from the following extract :

“ *January 26, 1715.* I sometimes long exceedingly to be with Christ, to behold his glory above, in the habitation not made with hands ; and the death of my dear and worthy brother, Mr. Peter Plenderleath, has contributed to increase my desires this way. The account of his death at *Fordoun*, as he was travelling north, has been both bitter and sweet to me. It is bitter to think of the universal loss that the Church of Christ has sustained by his death, and particularly his poor flock, and his poor wife and children, with whom I do cordially sympathize. It is sweet to think that he is now where he longed much to be. He was always commending Christ while here upon earth ; and now he is in the arms of Christ, feasting with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the rest of the ransomed company above, who are singing hallelujahs to Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. It is sweet also to think that I have another friend before me, with whom I hope to meet, when I shall drop this clay tabernacle that I carry about with me. O that his spirit might rest upon me, till I come to the place where he now is. I am informed that Mr. *William Trail* was with him at the time of his death ; and while [Mr. Trail] was praying, he cried out three times, Victory ! Victory ! Victory ! Oh ! he is now triumphing after the victory, with Christ and the company that have ‘ palms in their hands.’ ”

His sincere sympathy with the bereaved congregation and family was expressed by a kind visit which he

made, in compliance with the mourning Widow's request. The circumstances are thus narrated :

“ *July* —, 1715. About a fortnight ago, I received a letter from Mrs. Plenderleath, desiring of me the favour of a visit, and entreating I might order it so as to give them a Sabbath's supply in the parish of Saliné ; which desire of her's I granted on the 3d day of this month, being Sabbath. Immediately before it I was reading in my ordinary the history of Elijah's translation ; and I observed these words of Elisha at his dividing of Jordan, 2d Kings ii. 14, ‘ Where is the Lord God of Elijah ? ’ They were very sweet to me. The Lord was pleased to fix my meditations upon them, and to offer a great number of observations from them which I judged very proper to be insisted on in that parish, after the death of such an eminent person as the worthy Mr. Plenderleath. Accordingly I preached there yesterday. The Lord helped, in some measure, both in the lecture and sermon, and likewise in the evening public exercise. The dear Widow told me that the message had been very sweet to her, and that she had got some reviving thereby, for which I desire to bless the Lord. She being a very judicious, and, I think, exercised Christian, I tarried there all night, and came off in the morning after I had prayed with her.”

Nothing on earth, however, was more immediately interesting to Mr. Erskine than the welfare of his own wife, who had proved, as we have seen, a singularly excellent helper to him in his spiritual as well as temporal concerns. From the loss of so many of her children, from her bodily indispositions, and, above all, from a depression of spirits to which she was liable, she required

all that assistance and comfort which the sympathetic attention of a most affectionate husband could afford. At one time, probably in the year 1715, she laboured under a violent fever, and was considered by herself and by all around her, as at the point of death; but a gracious Providence restored her to health. Towards the close of the year following, she had another considerable affliction, which was also removed. But the appointed hour of separation at last arrived. Her delicate frame was gradually reduced by ailments which lasted for about a twelvemonth; and on Wednesday, August 31, 1720, she obtained a happy escape from all the infirmities and sorrows of this mortal life. Her husband, in an entry dated "*Sabbath, January 24, 1720*, after complaining of the iniquity of his heart and of the Lord's hiding his face from him, proceeds thus :

" Besides all this, I have had the rod of God laying upon my family by the *great distress of a dear wife*, on whom the Lord hath laid his hand, and on whom his hand doth still lie heavy. But O that I could proclaim the praises of his free grace, which has paid me a new and undeserved visit this day. He has been with me both in secret and public. I found the sweet smells of the Rose of Sharon, and my soul was refreshed with a new sight of him in the excellency of his person as Immanuel, and in the sufficiency of his everlasting righteousness. My sinking hopes are revived by the sight of him. My bonds are loosed, and my burdens of affliction made light, when he appears. In the mean time, I desire to join trembling with my mirth; for I am afraid that some storm of affliction is abiding me, and that this is given as a prelude and preparative thereto. But I desire to say, ' Here am I, let him do

to me as seemeth good unto him.' If he call me to go down to the swellings of Jordan, why not, if it be his holy will. Only be with me, Lord, and let thy rod and staff comfort me, and then I shall not fear to go through the valley of trouble, yea, through the valley of the shadow of death."

His anticipations of some approaching trial were mournfully verified by the event. In the very next page of the Diary he commences interesting details respecting the death and character of his beloved Wife, including both an "Account" he wrote for his own satisfaction, and a copy of a Letter addressed on this mournful occasion to Mr. and Mrs. Balderston of Edinburgh. His simple unvarnished statements regarding her integrity and piety, her temptations and deliverances, her salutary counsels to her children, her judicious conference with female friends, her peaceful departure notwithstanding former conflicts, and the various circumstances which combined to alleviate the pangs of separation, and called him to mingle songs of praise with the tears of sorrow, are equally honourable to the deceased wife and the surviving husband, and can scarcely fail to approve themselves to the heart of every reader, not utterly void of sensibility or candour. Due allowance must be made for the habits and manners of the times. The notice of that impressive prayer, which out of the depth of her mental distress, Mrs. Erskine was induced to offer up to God, in the presence of several clergymen, and at their request, however strange it may now appear, is too striking an instance of her own fervent piety, and too characteristic of the spirit that prevailed among the godly of that age, to be here omitted.

“ Here follows an Account of some things which relate to my dear wife, ALISON TURPIE, with whom I was married February 2, 1704, and whom the Lord called home to glory August 31, 1720.

“ She was a person of many rare and excellent endowments, both natural and spiritual. By nature she was a person of the greatest candour, equity, and ingenuity. For the whole world she would not have told a lie. She spoke the truth in her heart, her words being always the lively transcript of the thoughts of her heart. She abhorred every thing that looked like trick, or deceit, or fraud, in her dealings between man and man. She was of a quick and lively conception, not only about ordinary things, but in things divine and supernatural. She had a great reach of judgment in religion beyond many women that ever I conversed with.

“ About the third year that she and I were married, the Lord was pleased to plunge her into the greatest depths of humiliation that I ever knew. Before she fell into these depths, she told me that the Lord gave her such a discovery of the glory of Christ as darkened the whole creation, and made all things appear as dung and dross in comparison of him. This view, she said, was but a transient glance or glimpse of his glory ; and, immediately upon this discovery, she got such a sight of the enmity and unbelief of her heart, and of the strength of its opposition to Christ, and the way of salvation through him, that she fell under the most dreadful apprehensions of her having sinned the unpardonable sin ; and that what she had met with was only a taste of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, spoken of Heb. vi. 6. O that was a

terrible Scripture to her, and also Heb. x. 26–29. For a month or two the arrows of the Almighty were within her, the poison whereof did drink up her spirits; and the terrors of God did set themselves in array against her. The law of God, in its majesty, authority, and spirituality, was set before her. The particular sin she complained of was her unbelief. In these depths she continued till the Lord moved me to call some neighbouring ministers to join in prayer on her behalf, particularly Mr. Andrew Wardrope, in the parish of Balingry; Mr. Andrew Thomson, of Orwell; Mr. John Shaw, then minister of Leslie; Mr. John Currie, of Kinglassie. Every one of them prayed by turns with her in my closet, and conversed with her; but no relief appeared, till Mr. Wardrope proposed that she should pray with them before they parted. She was exceedingly averse from it; yet being constrained to it, and being in an agony of spirit through the terrors of God, she at last complied.

“But oh! that her words were now written, and printed in a book—that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For, to the conviction of all present, the Spirit of God spoke out of her. There was not, I suppose, a dry cheek among all the ministers, or others of the family, that were present. Her expressions were full of the Spirit—so suited to the case of her soul, and in such a heavenly eloquence, that if a general assembly of ministers had compiled and studied it, they could not have been better digested. The Lord, indeed, gave her the Spirit, and helped her to pray. When she arose from prayer, though the Lord had melted her soul, and the souls of all present, by her heavenly words and frame, still she continued

to charge herself with the unpardonable sin, and to conclude that she was but a castaway. The Lord, however, heard the voice of her weeping ; for that same day he was pleased, in some measure, to calm her spirit, and to break the strength of the temptation, so that, though she did not find full clearance, she had more quiet and composure of soul. The Lord particularly blessed a little book which Mr. Currie left her, called *Collings on Desertion, Temptation, &c.* Within some few days after this, though clouds were still around her, the Lord quieted the storm. He gave her a sweet serenity of mind, and helped her to a holy, tender, and circumspect walk, and an humble waiting upon him in the way of duty, both in public and private, for many years.

“I remember that, one day when I was walking through my closet, after the Lord had delivered her out of the depths, he was pleased to bear in upon my spirit a sense of his goodness towards her, and towards me and my family, in her deliverance. The consideration of the Lord’s goodness in calming her spirit, made a deep impression on my soul. This, I think, was the first time that ever I felt the Lord touching my heart in a sensible manner. I dare not say much on this head. Only her distress and affliction, with her deliverance, I always think, were blessed, not only to her, but to me also. I saw the fruits of it on her evidently discernible ; and, as to myself, I found the Lord after this now and then touching my heart, so that he drew me with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man. I remember, particularly, some few days or weeks after the Lord had quieted the agony of her spirit, she and I were sitting together in my closet, and while we

were conversing about the things of God, the Lord was pleased to rend the vail and give me a glimmering view of the way of salvation and redemption, which, I think, made my soul to acquiesce in Christ as the new and living way to glory. After this, she and I lived comfortably together for many years, her conversation and company being most savoury, edifying, and helpful to me. Several times she told me of sweet visits she had from the Lord ; the particulars of which I have now forgot. Only I am sure of this ; unless her eyes had been anointed with eye-salve, she could never have had such views of the spirituality and extent of the law, nor such clear and distinct up-takings of the Gospel. The more spiritual, the more evangelical, and the more searching any sermon was, it was always the sweeter to her taste ; which is a convincing evidence that her nature was renewed by the Holy Spirit. She was so strict and circumspect in her walk, that I was many times ashamed of myself, when I compared myself with her. She had an extraordinary sagacity, I remember, in discerning the stamp and image of God on any she conversed with, which did exceedingly endear them to her. The saints were in her view the excellent ones of the earth ; with them was all her delight. I may therefore warrantably conclude that she had passed from death to life ; and, consequently, that she has now passed from earth to heaven and glory.

“ I remember, that about this time twelvemonths her trouble did begin ; and oh ! it was a heavy and weary trouble to her. At first she had a swelling in her legs. . . . Melancholy was a great ingredient in her disease. The pressure of her affliction in body and in mind would have drawn pity from a heart of flint. O

it was heavy to me to see her many times sore tossed with the winds and waves of temptation, and in great bondage through fear of death. But the Lord, who does not contend for ever, was pleased to speak a word of comfort to her, which turned her storm into a pleasant calm. The word, I think was, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;' and then another word followed, which was this, 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' Some time after this, however, clouds and discouragements did again return; but it pleased the Lord that she was never so deeply nor so long under them, for the Lord was now and then giving her a reviving. About a month before her death, particularly, the Lord filled her with ardent longings after communion with Christ and conformity to him, which, I remember she told me of, and which I frequently improved for her comfort and encouragement, as a sure and sweet evidence of Christ's being truly formed in her soul.

"Most sweet and comfortable were her advices to her dear children, particularly to Jeany, who waited well and dutifully upon her during her long trouble and distress, which binds my heart exceedingly to that child; especially because her mother had a strong affection for her. She frequently entreated me to be kind to her children when she was gone, which, through grace, I resolve to be, so long as the Lord sees fit to spare me with them.

"It pleased the Lord to abate her trouble under which she had been for ten or eleven months together, so that she was able to go through the house, and to go out to the garden, till the fever came into the family among the children.

“ One day, about twenty days before her death, I remember, *Anne Archer* and *Margaret Walker* being here on a Saturday, she and they two went out to my garden, and sat down upon the seat below the east window, where I heard her and them fall a talking about the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and some points that are controverted among us at this day. I listened, and heard my worthy Dear talk of the freedom of the covenant of grace, of the nature of faith, and some other things, to my astonishment and admiration ; so that, for my life, I could not have made an extempore discourse upon them to such purpose and for such a long time as her discourse lasted, very near three quarters of an hour, without any considerable interruption—in so much that I was afraid that by her long and continued discourse she would do herself harm. I therefore at length opened the window, and spoke with a design to interrupt their discourse, and desired my Dear to come into the house, lest she should catch cold—which she accordingly did.”

“ Immediately after her death, I wrote the following Letter to B. Balderston and my Sister at Edinburgh :

“ Dear Brother and Sister,

The loss which I and my poor babes have sustained since my last to you is such that I dare scarcely allow myself the liberty of reflecting seriously upon it. When I begin to indulge myself in this way (which yet is almost inevitable), I am so sensibly touched therewith that my very spirits are like to be overwhelmed within me through grief and sorrow. But I know that excess this way is displeasing to the

Lord and prejudicial both to the outward and inward health; and therefore, as the Lord enables by his grace, I do and shall endeavour to restrain myself in this matter. The hand of the Lord, I must own, has touched me to the very quick in removing the desire of mine eyes; but yet I must also own that the Lord has mixed much matter of praise with this melancholy dispensation, which may serve to mitigate my grief, if I could reflect thereupon.

“ That I may divert my thoughts and fix the impression of the Lord’s goodness on myself, and furnish you with matter of praise as well as of sympathy, I shall condescend on a few [instances of it.] 1. I think it is matter of praise and gratitude that ever the Lord lent such a valuable person to me, and that for seventeen years, as a partaker of my griefs and joys. 2. It is matter of praise that the Lord, out of this sweet and fruitful vine, which grew by my house-side, hath raised seven little olive plants, which stand round about my table. 3. It is matter of praise that the Lord did not pull her away on a sudden, but did it gradually, and gave about a twelve-month’s warning, that he might loose our grips of her by little and little. 4. It is matter of praise that through the tract of her ordinary conversation there was such an air of heaven, such grace and holiness, such a steady and circumspect walk, such a watching with Christ and conformity to him, such a clear and distinct work of the Spirit, that we have not the least ground to doubt that she is now before the throne above. 5. It is matter of praise that though for a long while she was held in bondage through fear of death, yet about twenty days before her death, the Lord loosed her bonds, and spoke peace

to her by this word, ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,’ whereby the fears of death were in a great measure removed. The Lord also took her through Jordan without ever letting her know (when she was in the midst of it,) till she was on the other side in Immanuel’s land; for the fever carried her off both insensibly as to herself, and easily without the least visible pang, or distortion of her countenance. 6. It is matter of praise that the Lord made her not only an instrument in building my family and cherishing my body, but I hope a sweet instrument in bringing me to an acquaintance with Christ and religion; the Lord’s way of dealing with her, I mean the deep exercises of her spirit and the desirable issue of them, being blessed of the Lord, I hope to me also. It was in the time of the Lord’s working effectually with her that he was pleased, as I would hope, to reveal his Son in me; so that it will be eternal matter of praise that ever the Lord gave her to me. If I were as I ought to be, I would render back the sweet loan with thanks. But O what a struggle is it to bring my thoughts and will in this matter into captivity to the obedience of the Lord; the parting with her being to nature like the tearing of one member of the body from another. But what shall I say? He himself has done it, and who am I that I should reply against God? The Lord hath seen fit to increase my care and charge with respect to my dear babes. Oh pray that the Lord may enable me, in some measure, to supply the room of her to them, who, for prudence and management, was as a parent both to them and me ———.* I must close at

* A melancholy circumstance is mentioned at the conclusion of this letter. Mrs. Erskine, about a month before her death, hav-

present, entreating your sympathy with us in affliction.
And I remain

Your afflicted and affectionate brother,
EBENEZER ERSKINE.

Portmoak, Sept. 1, 1720.

“*P. S.* I pray give my duty to Mr. CHARLES ERSKINE,* who did me the kindness to come to the funeral, though he had not a letter, being in the country without our knowledge.—I am a little troubled with pains in my head, and a beating at my heart. Pray give me your advice about it, for I incline to take care of myself for the sake of the dear babes, to whom I desire now to be both a father and a mother.”

To these details respecting Mrs. Erskine, we may subjoin the following notice, which was very providen-

ing given a necessary and modest reproof to a servant, the girl returned an insolent and abusive answer, full of “devilish invectives,” which had “such an impression on her broken frame and constitution,” that she became rapidly worse, and never recovered. This general notice of that affair is sufficient. A few other sentences both in this letter and in the previous “account” are omitted; and we may take this opportunity of stating, that since writing the explanation given in the note, p. 81, we have found the necessity of greater curtailment than was at first intended. In various extracts, redundant *sentences* as well as phrases are omitted, and some unimportant circumstances passed over. The most scrupulous care is at the same time taken to suppress nothing essential, and uniformly to avoid both the misstating of facts, and the misrepresentation of the writer’s meaning.

* This was probably Charles Erskine, of Tinwald, at that time an advocate, and Professor of Public Law in the University of Edinburgh; and afterwards Lord of Session, and Lord Justice Clerk. He died in 1763, at the age of 82, much lamented. See Lord Woodhouselee’s *Mem. of Lord Kames*, vol. i. pp. 38, 39.

tially written, preserved, and discovered. It relates to her feelings and conduct in a time of affliction some years before, when her immediate dissolution was expected.

“ *Monday, Dec. 12, 1720.* When I was yesterday seeking some paper, I fell upon a bit of short-hand written by my brother of Dunfermline ; and when I began to read it, I found that it was some words taken from the mouth of my dear wife, about five or six years ago, when people had been called in to see her die of a lingering fever, from which she recovered. The words were as follows :

‘ I think, indeed, I have got a discovery of the absolute need of Christ for salvation. It is the desire of my soul to cleave to him. Oh ! ye that are young people, remember your Creator in the days of your youth. You cannot begin too soon. I was long enough of beginning myself. The Lord was always giving me some touch ; but I was never brought off from the law, till he discovered himself. I would *fain* commend Christ to you, Sirs, if I knew how to do it. You will never be safe till you get to him for shelter. He is a strong hold. He is God’s way to sinners, and the saint’s way to God. Never one saw him, but saw him beyond all other objects ; and people never understand any thing aright till they know Christ. Though he should slay me, I desire to die praising and commending him. Speaking to her husband, she said, my Dear, you have been a very kind husband to me ; the Lord will take care of you and of our children.—Oh ! said she, I have no other claim or title to heaven but through Christ. ‘ I answered her,’ says my brother Ralph, ‘ that there was no other needed ; to which she answered, No, no !

O to sleep in Jesus ! O it is a sweet rest ! I desire to cling to him. As for death, I cannot say, but I am not afraid of it. The Lord, I think, has sometimes done me good, and I hope he will not leave me in my extremity. Whom the Lord loves, he loves unto the end. He will never, I think, forsake a poor soul to whom he has once discovered himself. Blessed be God, who has provided Him in whom there is an infinite fullness. I think I have seen his complete righteousness. I think he will never cast off a soul that desires to cleave to him.'

"These are the words," it is added with much feeling, "that I found taken from her mouth by my dear brother Ralph. I bless the Lord that put it into his mind to write them, and I bless the Lord who has preserved this paper in which they are written ; for they have been *very refreshing* to my soul on her account, and confirm my hope anent her being with the Lord in glory."

His "dear brother Ralph" did indeed feel keenly for him under his numerous afflictions, and heart-rending bereavements. In those days of trial, his kind visits to Portmoak were frequently repeated, and his tender sympathy and seasonable counsel served greatly to alleviate the sharpness of grief. The Sabbath after the interment of Mrs. Erskine, he occupied the pulpit of the widowed husband, and selected these words for his text, Ezek. xxiv. 18. "So I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died ; and I did in the morning as I was commanded." Next day, when about to take leave, his horse waiting him at the door, he turned and addressing Jean, his amiable niece, asked her if she had her mother's Bible at hand. The Bible being immediately presented, he wrote on one of its

blank pages the same four lines which were subsequently engraven on the tomb-stone.

In the desolate condition in which he now found himself, EBENEZER called his sins to remembrance, and lay low in the dust of self-abasement. His resignation, however, not merely flowed from convictions of his own sinfulness, and of the rectitude of the divine administration, but was sustained by faith in that Gospel which brings life and immortality to light, and accompanied by a prayerful dependence on the promises of God for all necessary mercies to himself and to his motherless children. The spirituality of his mind, and the warm affections of his heart, are strikingly breathed out in the following extracts :

“ *Saturday, Oct. 8, 1720.* This night, when about my studies, the Lord made my meditation on him sweet. Oh ! I envied the happiness of my dear wife, who is beholding, admiring, and praising the Redeemer on Mount Zion. When shall I be there also, beyond sinning ? O who can tell what it is to be with the Lord ? O to be helped to honour and serve him, while in the weary wilderness, and to be found ‘so doing.’ I was made to wonder at my own folly in sinning against the Lord, and to wonder at the Lord’s pardoning grace and mercy.”

“ *Oct. 18, between 5 and 6 in the morning,* I went to secret duty, and got some access, I thought, in prayer, to the Lord. I was helped particularly to pray that the Lord would sanctify my widowhood, and that, seeing he had taken away that sweet creature which was the desire of mine eyes, he would give me ‘the desire of all nations’ in her room, and then I should be a

gainer instead of being a loser. I was helped to justify the Lord, and to see his equity and righteousness in afflicting me, saying, 'But thou art holy, O thou who inhabitest the praises of Israel.' I was helped to pray for my poor children, and by name, to cast them upon the Lord. The Lord has given me the sole charge of them as a parent, and I got liberty to lay the charge of them back again upon himself, who is far more able to bear it. I gave the charge of them as to their temporal concerns to the Lord; for 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' I gave the charge of them also, as to their spiritual and eternal concerns, to the Lord; which I may do with the more confidence, because the promise is unto me and to my children, and he has said, 'Leave thy fatherless (or motherless) children upon me;' and again, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' He encouraged parents to bring their children to him, while here upon earth; and he is the same now as ever. I got liberty to bring them to him for a blessing. It is the very desire of my soul that they may be a seed to serve the Lord, and to make his name to be remembered through all generations. I was concerned that the Lord would enable me to act the part of a parent to them, and that, if it be his holy will, he may spare me a while for this very end. But I know that though he should call me off the stage, he can see better to them than if I were alive to look after them."

The events of providence fully justify that proverbial saying; "Afflictions seldom come alone—almost always in clusters." Within less than a quarter of a year after the death of his excellent partner, Mr. Erskine was bereaved of his much valued brother-in-law, Mr. BAL-

DERSTON, of Edinburgh, who died Nov. 23, 1720. On this occasion he wrote a most affectionate and consolatory letter to his mourning sister ; a copy of which he preserved in his Diary.

“ Nov. 25, 1720. *This night I had the melancholy news of the death of B. Balderston, on which I wrote the following letter :*

“ Dear Sister,

The melancholy news of the death of my dear and worthy brother did not reach me till Friday about 7 at night. My tender sympathy with you, and my entire respect to his memory, fill me with a strong desire to be at Edinburgh, that I might, in person, condole your loss, and comfort you with the same consolations wherewith I have been comforted in the like case, and that I might also concur in the funeral solemnity of such a near and dear relation. But, considering that it is impracticable that I could reach Edinburgh to-morrow, as the tide falls, so as to be present at the funeral, and that I have been, and still am labouring under such indisposition that I have not preached these two Sabbaths bygone, I am laid under a necessity of deferring my journey.

Dear afflicted Sister, I know, or at least I may know, the heart of a stranger in losses of this kind, which you are now visited with. My wound is yet fresh and green, and therefore my sympathy with, and concern for you cannot fail to be the more lively. But glory to our exalted Lord, that neither you nor I have any reason to mourn as they that have no hope. Your worthy friend and mine had his conversation adorned with the genuine characters of a true citizen of Zion, Psalm xv., and therefore you have reason to believe and hope

that he has now his abode in God's tabernacle and holy hill, even in Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where he is joined to the 'general assembly of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect,' who are beholding the King in his beauty, and singing the new song, Rev. v. 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.' Oh! how sweet a balance may it be to our spirits under the loss of such dear relations, to think of the heartsome work they are employed in, the heartsome company they are joined to, and the lightsome house of many mansions wherein they dwell, not as passengers, but as pillars that shall go no more out. Should we not rather long to be with them than grudge their removal from us, and from the crazy tabernacles of clay wherein they groaned under so many burdens. Let us then lift up our heads in the hope of that life they desired, and are now actually possessed of. The time is short; and therefore let us be encouraged, for that within a little we shall follow them, and then they and we shall be for ever with the Lord; which, indeed, is best of all. What an excellent thing is it, to be fairly landed on the other side of Jordan, standing on the banks of Immanuel's land, crying Victory, victory, victory, for evermore, through the blood of the Lamb, over sin, the devil, death, and hell. How sweet is it to be sitting with overcomers on the same throne with the Son of God, as he also overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne. Let us *up with our drooping hearts*; for the same chariot that has carried our worthy friends to glory, where they walk with Christ in white, will speedily return to fetch us also; and, though they and we drop the mantle of

the body in the passage, yet we shall receive it again with advantage in the morning of the resurrection, when these vile bodies shall be made like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus. Christ's dead men shall live; as his dead body shall they arise, when the dew of God's Spirit shall, like the dew of herbs, descend upon them; and when that melodious sound shall break through the clouds, as with the sound of a trumpet, 'Awake, ye that dwell in dust, and sing.' Then they and we shall say one to another, 'Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.'—But I must conclude, and remain,

Your affectionate and sympathizing brother,

EBENEZER ERSKINE."

The death of Mr. Balderston was speedily followed by another breach in his own family. The small-pox, that most fatal distemper in those days, cut off a very dear girl, little more than three months after her mother's decease. With what tenderness does he record this event; and what meek submission and animating hope does he express in the following entry! Even allowing that, at this time, and on some former occasions of the same kind, he may have attached a disproportionate importance to several little circumstances that occurred, who that knows the feelings of a parent would severely censure him for having put on these pleasing incidents an interpretation so natural and so soothing to a father's heart?

"Upon the 7th day of Dec. my dear, sweet, and pleasant child, ISABEL ERSKINE, died of the small-pox, on the 9th day of the eruption. I got freedom,

during her sickness, particularly the same forenoon before she died, to present her before the Lord, and to plead his covenant on her behalf. The Lord enabled me to quit her freely unto him on this account, that he had a far better title to her than I. She is mine only as her earthly father; but she is his by creation, by preservation, by dedication to him in baptism, and his also, I hope, by covenant and by redemption; and therefore I am persuaded that she is now his by glorification; and that she is with the Lord Jesus, and with her dear mother, triumphing with God in glory. I had a particular affection for the child, and doted but too much upon her, because she was the likest her mother of any of the children, both as to her countenance and humour. But I see that the Lord will not allow me to have any idols, but will have the whole of my heart to himself; and, Lord, let it be so—Amen and amen. Though thou shouldest strip me naked of all that I have in the world, O happy exchange!

“I remember that a day or two before the child fell sick, she was in my closet. She and I being alone, I took her on my knee and dandled her, and she was very fond of me, took me round the neck and kissed me; which engaged my heart very much. But my love and affection to the child filled me with a strong desire to have Christ formed in her soul, and thereupon I began to commend Christ to her. The Lord helped me to speak of Christ to her in such words as were suitable to her capacity, to which she seemed very attentive. Particularly, I told her, I remember, that she would die, and that it would be better to die and to go to heaven where Christ is, and where she would meet with her dear mother, than to be here; at which words

the dear child gave a *broad look* in my face, as if she had been taken with the thing. I bless the Lord who put it in my heart and mouth to converse with her at that time. I hope the Lord entered into her heart with what I said to her. She died pleasantly without any visible pang or throw; her soul, I hope, being carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, and her body buried at her mother's side in the chapel burying-ground, Scotland-well, in her brother Alexander's grave.

"I take it kindly that the Lord comes to my family to gather lillies, wherewith to garnish the upper sanctuary, 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' And Oh! it sometimes affords me a pleasing prospect to think that I have so much *plenishin* in heaven before me, and that when I enter the gates of glory, I shall not only be welcomed by the whole general assembly of saints and angels, but my wife and four pleasant babes will, in a particular manner, welcome me to those regions of glory, and I shall join in the hallelujahs of the higher house which shall never have an end."

Nearly three years after the death of Isabella, his daughter ALISON was seized with a dangerous illness, which gave fresh occasion to the exercise of Christian resignation. In the following entry relative to this dispensation, he strongly expresses his entire acquiescence in the will of God.

"*September 26, 1723.* My pleasant child *Alice* [afterwards Mrs. Scott,] has been ill of a fever this eight days past; and this evening I went designedly to the throne in prayer on her behalf; and I thought the Lord was pleased in some good measure to breathe

upon me. I got not liberty, that I recollect of, to pray for her life and recovery ; but the Lord seemed to loose my heart from her, so that I got her surrendered freely to him, and I was made to say from the bottom of my soul, ‘ Welcome Lord to come and pluck a flower in my family, if thou hast use for her in the upper paradise.’ Through grace I gave her anew to the Lord—gave her up to God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I find indeed a struggle from natural affection to quit her ; but the consideration of her being the Lord’s more than mine balances it at present. The Lord help me to abide at it.”

It pleased God, however, to spare this promising flower in his family, to bring it to maturity, and to defer transplanting it to the celestial paradise, till for the long period of ninety-four years it had continued to shed its fragrance on the earth.

Mr. Erskine himself, as appears from some of the above documents, was very unwell for some time after he became a widower. In one of his letters to Mrs. Balderston, he complains of a palpitation he felt in his heart as well as pains in his head ; and in the other, states his inability to preach for several Sabbaths. The sorrows of his heart produced injurious effects on his bodily frame, which seem to have lasted for three or four years. From these infirmities, however, he gradually recovered. Accordingly, in spring 1728, when it was urged as a reason for his translation to Kinross, that his situation at Portmoak was unfavourable to his health, he expressed himself in these words :

“ I beg leave to say to the praise of the great Preserver of men, that since my settlement in the parish of

Portmoak, I have enjoyed as great a measure of health as my neighbours, who imagine they breathe a purer air. I own that within these seven years, I was threatened with a stagnation of blood, occasioned not by bad air, as I think, but by the melancholy which followed upon the decease of a dear relation. But whenever nature, with the good hand of God, surmounted that violent shock, I returned to my former good state of health, which, I bless the Lord, he has continued with me now these four years past.”*

Some time after the death of his wife and children, he caused a stone to be erected over her dust, in the chapel ground of Scotlandwell, where it may still be seen. This monument is in a better state of preservation than the adjacent one, commemorative of Margaret Halcro, her mother-in-law. Both are placed horizontally, and supported by small pillars. The inscription on Mrs. Erskine’s monument is as follows :

Here lies the valuable dust of
ALISON TURPIE, spouse to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine,
Minister of the Gospel in Portmoak,
Who departed to glory, after she had
Borne ten children, four of which lie here
Interred with her. She died August 31, 1720,
Aged 39 years.

HENRY ERSKINE, born August 6, 1705.

Departed June 8, 1713.

ALEXANDER, born July 20, 1708.

Departed June 20, 1713.

* Portmoak MS.

RALPH, born January 17, 1712.

Died April , 1713.

ISABEL, born July 21, 1716.

Died December 7, 1720.

The law brought forth her precepts ten,
And then dissolved in grace ;
This saint ten children bore, and then
In glory took her place.

Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the
dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth her dead.

Isaiah xxvi. 19.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Erskine's second marriage—Death of his Mother, and of his Brother's wife—Various unsuccessful attempts to remove him from Portmoak—Calls to Burntisland and Tulliallan—Proposal from the parish of Saline—Call to Kirkaldy prevented notwithstanding the wishes of the people—Call to Kinross—Call and Translation to Stirling—Lasting friendship between Mr. Erskine and the people of Portmoak—Importance of his new charge—His predecessors and colleagues—Diligence, faithfulness, and success.

CHRISTIANS of every class, and in particular the ministers of the Gospel, have often found cause to adore the inscrutable but righteous agency of Providence in the diversified afflictions allotted to them in the same day of adversity. A coincidence of this description is very observable in the public and private trials of his faith and patience assigned to Mr. Erskine. The years 1713, 1714, and 1715, were marked by the trouble and vexation resulting from the imposition of the Abjuration Oath on the clergy of Scotland, while the year 1720 was the date of that memorable Act of Assembly condemning the Marrow, which gave rise to much controversy and obloquy; and all these years were at the same time seasons of great affliction and mortality in his domestic circle. Yet under the pressure of complicated distress his soul was upheld by the aids of di-

vine grace ; nor did the aspect of Providence wear a continual frown. Light frequently arose in the midst of darkness ; alleviations of trouble were seasonably afforded ; and in the manner that seemed good to infinite wisdom, the sorrows of adversity were tempered by the joys of prosperity.

His grief for the loss of Alison Turpie, his excellent wife, was deep and lasting. Two years after her death, he expresses his affectionate regret in the following words, written on the title page of one of his Notebooks :

“ Ebenezer Erskine, August 31, 1722, the same day two years since, my dearest, the wife of my youth and the wife of my bosom, departed to glory. Lord, prepare me to follow her.”

Nevertheless, when the circumstances of his six motherless children surviving are considered, it is not wonderful that he himself and his best friends judged it proper for him to enter a second time into the bonds of marriage. Aware of the importance of this step, he earnestly solicited the Divine direction and blessing.

In the year 1721, he records his exercise in the following terms. After noticing the holy boldness with which he was encouraged at all times to approach the throne of grace, he expresses his persuasion that it was the Lord’s will he should ask another help-meet, and thus proceeds :

“ Accordingly I fell down before the Lord to seek his counsel in the matter, and he put these or the like words in my mouth. ‘ Oh Lord my God in Christ, it has pleased thee, in thy holy and adorable providence, to bring me into a state of widowhood, by taking away

the very desire of mine eyes. I bless thee with my soul for the desirable loan that thou gavest me of my dear wife.——* And O Lord, as thou didst choose a help-meet for me, when I did not ask it, so now, seeing thou hast brought me into this solitary life, if it be thy mind that I should seek after another help for me, I lay the burden of the choice upon thee. Thou hast hitherto helped; I trust that thou wilt still help. Lord, take the guiding of my affections and inclinations in this matter into thy own hand; for I give them up entirely to thee, that thou mayest manage them. If it be not meet that I should be alone, Lord show the woman whom thou designest for me, and thy choice shall be my choice. O Lord, hear, help, and pity, and do all for the sake of thine anointed.”

His first intentions with regard to this important affair are more particularly stated in the following entry :

“ *August 8, 1722.* In the midst of secret prayer I was directed to seek of the Lord, that he would provide a help-meet for me, and a mother meet for my poor motherless children. And particularly, seeing he had inclined my heart and affections towards that desirable person ——, and seeing there seemed to be a concurrence of Providences leading me to fix upon her, particularly a joyful consent of all my friends and well-wishers to whom this matter is imparted, and seeing he had put it into the heart of some dear to himself to pray for success to the design, I was encouraged to plead, and in some measure to *believe*, notwithstanding some discouragement, that He who has the heart in his

* The sentences respecting his first wife here omitted have been quoted p. 83.

hand, and turns it as the rivers of water, would incline her heart to a compliance with the proposal in his own time and way."

The pious in all ages have justly considered humble supplication as an appointed and an efficacious means of obtaining not only spiritual blessings, but also temporal benefits really conducive to their good. Nor do they entertain an irrational or unscriptural fancy, when they regard that devout enlargement and satisfaction of spirit, with which they may be enabled to solicit some outward comfort, as calculated to confirm their persuasion that the God of providence will either actually grant them that particular mercy, or otherwise arrange their affairs in a manner more subservient to their ultimate welfare. There is no just cause, however, to consider the comfortable impressions they may feel at the throne of grace, as intended to assure them that the temporal blessing requested shall certainly be given. A tendency to view such impressions in this prophetic light was very common, it appears, among good people in this country in the early part of the last century; and even men of vigorous minds, as Colonel Blackader* and the subject of this memoir, were not altogether superior to these prevailing misconceptions.

The remarks of President Edwards on this topic are worthy of notice.† Speaking of what is implied in God's accepting the supplications of his people, he observes that "He sometimes manifests his acceptance of their prayers by special discoveries of his mercy and

* See Crichton's *Life and Diary of L. C. Blackader*, ch. vii. pp. 149-151.

† See *Practical Sermons*, pp. 68, 69. Edin. Ed. 1788.

sufficiency, which he makes in prayer, or immediately after." This is illustrated by the experience of Hannah, as recorded 1st Sam. i. 13. But the judicious author adds, "Not that I conclude that persons can hence argue that the particular thing which they ask will certainly be given them, or that they can particularly foretel from it what God will do in answer to their prayers, any farther than he has promised in his word. Yet God may, and doubtless does thus testify his acceptance of their prayers, and from hence they may confidently rest in his providence, in his merciful ordering and disposing with respect to the thing which they ask."

The course of providence, one should think, as well as the lessons of Scripture, might have served to correct the mistake in question; for, though events occasionally corresponded, they often proved contrary to the hopes that were founded on impressions. We have seen, for instance, that Mr. Erskine's son, Henry, died of his distemper, although two female friends told him they had "got great assurances of his life."* On this occasion too, notwithstanding the encouragement he took from the appearances of providence, and from the prayers of pious intimates to "believe" that the design would succeed, the expected union did not take place.

It pleased God, however, to give him a second partner, and one who was much recommended to him by her relation to a father in the ministry, whom he held in great veneration for his piety, and his zealous efforts in the cause of evangelical truth. His gratitude to God for this new providential favour, and his solicitude

* Page 269.

to obtain the divine blessing on the interesting connection in immediate prospect, appear from the following sentences, extracted from an entry relating to this subject :

“ *Thursday, January 16, 1724.* This night eight nights is the time fixed upon for my marriage with Miss MARY WEBSTER, the worthy daughter of that worthy champion for the truth and cause of Christ, Mr. James Webster. Much of the Lord’s hand has been seen in carrying on this design hitherto. And now this night between 10 and 11 I fell down on my knees, saying to this effect ; ‘ Oh my God, my Father who art in heaven, and my blessed Elder Brother and Priest who art passed into the heavens, I invite, I entreat thy presence to my marriage with thy handmaid. My father and her father are among the ransomed company that are singing thy praises before the throne ; and therefore I plead and pray that thou mayest show so much kindness to their children as to countenance us in this design with thy presence ; seeing thou hast said, I will be their God and the God of their seed, and will show mercy to thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. Doubtless thou art my Father, thou art my Father, and thy name is from everlasting. Oh my Elder Brother, who lovedst me and gavest thyself for me, thou didst accept of an invitation to the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and honour it with thy bodily presence, and there thou showedst forth thy glory ; may I hope and believe that thou wilt accept of this invitation, and grace my marriage with thy spiritual presence ? I shall reckon this an honour indeed.

“ O Lord thou art my God, I will prepare thee an

habitation ; my Father's God, and I will exalt thee. O let the God of the bride, and her father's God, come along with her to this family. Let her come as a blessing to me, and as a blessing to the children whom thou hast given me ; and O dwell with her and me and the little ones ; and then, though we live in a solitary place, we shall not be a solitary family, but the voice of melody and of rejoicing shall be heard in this tabernacle, as in the tabernacles of the righteous. O let us be a blessed couple in the Lord ; let us live in the Lord, and die in the Lord, and love one another in the Lord. O turn not away my prayer, nor thy mercy from me."

This marriage was accordingly celebrated on Thursday, January 23, 1724, about three years and five months after the death of Alison Turpie. His second wife became also the mother of several children, and was spared with him till March 1751.

His affectionate endeavours to secure the comfort of his surviving "little ones" did not prevent the discharge of filial duty to Margaret Halcro, his venerable mother. In an entry dated July 22, 1722, he says, "I devoted myself and my children by name unto the Lord, and was helped to pray for them that the grace of God might rest on them—and on my *aged mother*." She died at his house in Portmoak, as has been stated,* January 14, 1725, about a twelvemonth after his marriage with Miss Webster.

A few years after having dropt the tear of sorrow

* Pages 41, 42.

over the remains of his beloved mother, his compassionate feelings were excited anew by the death of MARGARET DEWAR, the much esteemed wife of his brother Ralph. Having himself experienced the sympathy of Ralph under a similar painful bereavement ten years before, he did not fail, in his turn, to give equal evidence of brotherly attachment and condolence on this mournful occasion. Among other marks of his attention, he preached for him on the Sabbath immediately following the day of her interment, as appears from a memorandum placed at the head of a sermon in manuscript on Heb. ii. 10,—“ To make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

“ Dunfermline, the Sabbath after the death of my sister-in-law, November 29, 1730. My sister died the Sabbath afternoon before.”

Amidst the numerous vicissitudes he experienced in a private capacity, Ebenezer Erskine was enabled to pursue an honourable and most useful career in his public character as a minister of Christ. His popularity seems to have progressively increased; and while he distinguished himself alike by an assiduous discharge of pastoral duty, and by his public services to the cause of truth, it is not wonderful that he attracted the notice of parishes more populous and considerable than that of Portmoak. The attachment, however, which he felt to his original charge was strong; and when repeated efforts were made to remove him, he discovered great caution and prudence, humble resignation to the will of providence, and an inclination rather to submit to hardships than rashly to dissolve a sacred and an endearing connection.

The first attempt to translate him, of which we have discovered any trace, was made at BURNTISLAND. In January 1712, some time after the translation of the Rev. John Cleghorn from that parish to Wemyss, a moderation took place in the church of Burntisland, at which two candidates were proposed—Mr. Erskine of Portmoak, and a Mr. *William Duguid*, a probationer. The heritors, magistrates, and elders appear to have been almost equally divided betwixt the two; and in consequence the Presbytery “agreed by a plurality of votes to lay aside the calls for both candidates.”* The friends of Mr. Duguid protested and appealed to the superior courts, and ultimately obtained, what was then a most obnoxious novelty, a royal presentation from Queen Anne in his favour; but circumstances occurred by which their hopes were blasted and their exertions rendered abortive.

In the year following a second and more auspicious attempt was formed to break asunder the tie by which the minister of Portmoak and his people were united. An earnest and unanimous call was given him by the parishioners of TULLIALLAN, including the town of Kincardine, on the banks of the Forth. At a meeting of Presbytery at Kirkaldy in May 1713, commissioners from that parish and from the Presbytery of Dunblane appeared, and presented a “Call subscribed by heritors, elders, and masters of families,” with “Reasons for transportation,” and a formal Invitation subscribed by the Ministers of that Presbytery. At a subsequent meeting at Dysart on the 11th June, the Presbytery gave judgment in the cause. Parties being fully

* Rec. of Presb. of Kirk. Feb. 14, 1712.

heard, and "one of the members having prayed for light and direction in this weighty affair," it was carried unanimously *not transport*. But Colonel John Erskine, "principal Heritor of the parish of Tulliallan," protested against the decision, and appealed to the Synod of Fife. It thus became necessary to appoint a member to answer the reasons of appeal. The following paragraph in the answers, which were prepared by Mr. Wardrope, approved by the Presbytery, and laid on the Synod's table, seems worthy of insertion :

The commissioners from Tulliallan had drawn an argument from the circumstance, that the object of their choice had submitted to ordination at Portmoak on the condition that, on his receiving a "unanimous call to another place, they would transport him ; and not only so, but the Presbytery had allowed him an act of transportability." In reply to this reason the Presbytery express themselves thus :

"We answer, there was indeed an act of transportability granted to Mr. Erskine at his admission ; but that in granting thereof we had an eye to the disagreeableness of the air at Portmoak to his constitution ; this we absolutely refuse. And further we say, there would be a great deal of weight in this act of transportability, if Mr. Erskine himself were urgent and importunate for this transportation ; but nothing like this appears. There is not one paragraph in the paper given in by him to the Presbytery showing his inclination this way ; but, on the contrary, he evidenced his great love and entire affection to the parish of Portmoak, and his readiness to be spent in his Master's work among that people, adding, that he would look

upon it as a new call from God to labour among them, should the Presbytery of Kirkaldy continue him there : Which, with the parish of Portmoak's unanimous inclination to have him continued among them, and the consideration of the difficulty which appeared unavoidable in settling Portmoak again with an able faithful Gospel minister, as matters now stand (*verbum sapienti sat est**)—we say these things had weight with us to continue our Reverend and dear Brother, Mr. Erskine, at Portmoak ; and it is hoped they will have weight with this reverend judicatory, to confirm our sentence and not *ranverse* the same."†

The following entry in the Diary breathes the same resigned and disinterested spirit with the declaration he subsequently made to the Presbytery, and still further demonstrates his entire sincerity in that public declaration :

" *Sabbath, March 29, 1713.* After 10 at night, I went to secret prayer.——In regard I have at this time the prospect of a call to the parish of Tulliallan, O Lord, clear up my duty in this matter unto me, and let me not be led by my own inclination. If it be for thy glory and for the good of souls, I am content to go ; and if thou hast any use for me in this place, I am content to stay, and bear with inconveniences. My burden will be light, if thou wilt clear up duty to me in this matter. I commit my way unto the Lord, and therefore I believe that he will direct my path. I roll

* " A word to the wise is enough." The Presbytery obviously allude to the great difficulties arising from the unhappy revival of the law of patronage.

† Rec. of Presb. of Kirk.

the affair over on him who has the stars in his right hand, and the government upon his shoulders, and who appoints the bounds of my habitation. I arose from prayer, hoping and believing that God will order this affair to the best, and direct me so to carry in it as that the Gospel may not sustain any prejudice through my miscarriage."

The Synod of Fife, at their meeting the 30th September 1713, by a great majority, affirmed the sentence of the Presbytery, and continued Mr. Erskine at Portmoak. "Colonel John Erskine, in his own name, and in the name of the parish of Tulliallan, appealed to the Commission of the General Assembly to meet at Edinburgh the second Wednesday of November next."* But the appeal was fruitless; the Commission, after hearing the papers and speeches of the parties, ratified the decision of the Presbytery and Synod.

Notwithstanding the disappointment thus sustained by the parish of Tulliallan, the people of SALINE, about two years after, conceived a strong affection for this minister as a person well qualified to repair the heavy loss they had suffered in the death of Mr. Plenderleath; and at first cherished the hope that he might be persuaded to acquiesce in their request. This proposal, however, in consequence of the discouragement which Mr. Erskine himself considered it his duty promptly to give it, was speedily relinquished. All that we know of the matter is contained in the following extracts from his journal:

"*P. July* —, 1715. [After the account of his

* Records of the Synod of Fife.

preaching at Saline, formerly quoted,* he mentions his being called to visit an excellent Christian dying of a decay, and then adds;] As I was going to visit this person, Mr. *Geddie*, who went along with me, told me that he had a commission from the heritors and elders of the parish to tell me that their eyes were centered upon me, and that they had a design to call me to be their minister, and desired me to have my thoughts on it till the next Sabbath, at Dunfermline, where the sacrament is to be administered, expecting that I will then declare my mind with respect to this matter. The Lord pity, and give light and direction in it. The stipend is less, the people there are more unruly, and the dwelling-house is worse than here. Yet, if my heart do not deceive me—though I have no inclination to leave this place—I would be content to go any where, where Christ, my great Master, has service for me, if I might be more instrumental to convert and bring in souls to his obedience. Lord, give light, that I may return an answer to that people.”

“*July* 13. On Monday last, in the afternoon, I conversed at Dunfermline with Mr. *Geddie*, school-master in Saline, anent the proposal which he made to me in the name of the heritors and elders of the parish of Saline. My answer to him was to this purpose—that I was willing to serve the Lord in any part of his vineyard which he should please to call me to; that he had already fixed me in Portmoak, and I could not give my consent to my removal from that place, but would oppose it: though if the Lord over-ruled the affair against any opposition I made to it, I should be sa-

tisfied to be determined by the issue of Providence ;— that I did not incline to run before, but to follow after, the motions of Providence. I told him that I had no grievances to speak of in the parish of Portmoak, except it were the unwholesome *stance* of the manse, and now, I believed, it was become a second nature to me ; whereas I did not know what I might meet with in the parish of Saline, especially if I should give my countenance to, or had an active hand in my own transportation ; and therefore I advised them to look for another.”

A renewed effort to change the sphere of this minister's labours took place in the year 1724, shortly after the Marrow Controversy had given increased publicity to his character, and while the passions excited by the agitation of that memorable contest had not got sufficient time in almost any degree to subside. These circumstances serve to account both for the ardent wishes of the population of Kirkaldy to obtain him, and for the determined, perhaps resentful, policy, with which the intended call was obstructed and prevented. Mr. Henry Dall, the first minister in that collegiate charge, having departed this life in February 1724, the heritors, elders and people, with very few exceptions, soon fixed their eyes on Mr. Erskine as a most eligible person to succeed him. In compliance with their request, a moderation was granted by the Presbytery. Mr. James Dickson was appointed to preach ; “ Mr. Pitcairn and Mr. Cleghorn, or any one of them, to be his assistants.” On the day of moderation, the 7th May, two candidates were put on the leet to supply the vacant charge, Mr. Erskine of Portmoak and Mr.

John Drysdale, then second minister of Kirkaldy. When the Moderator proposed the question, whether any person in the meeting objected against any of these two candidates, a Mr. Archibald Robertson, who professed to be commissioned by the tutors of Sir James Wemyss of Bogie, protested against Mr. Erskine being in the leet. The principal reason he alleged for this protest, indeed the only reason at all relating to Mr. Erskine's character, was the line of conduct this minister had pursued with regard to the Marrow Controversy; respecting which the Protester expressed himself in the following terms:

“ Mr. Erskine's disaffection and disobedience to the constitution of this church is manifestly evident, in that he did not only join with the other eleven Brethren in presenting a Remonstrance to the General Assembly, containing many injurious reflections, but likewise, when the said Remonstrance was condemned, and the foresaid Brethren admonished and rebuked therefore, (Act 7th, Assembly 1722,) they were so far from being gained by this lenity—their offence deserving a much higher censure, as the Assembly at the same time declared—that a Protestation was offered by some of them against this Act of Assembly, the highest and last Judicature in this Church,—Mr. Ebenezer Erskine and all the rest of these Brethren adhering thereto, or at least none of them reclaiming as they ought to have done; which I conceive to have been a crime of the highest nature against the constitution and unity of this Church. Further, that Mr. Erskine, ever since that time, has given no evidence of his change of mind in these things for which he was rebuked and admonished, as aforesaid; but, on the con-

trary, given shrewd presumptions on several occasions of his stiff adherence thereto. Therefore he is a person improper for a call or transportation from the place wherein he resides, and much more incapable of being upon the leet, in order to a call or transportation to such an important charge as Kirkaldy is. And upon the whole, I further protest that there be no moderation of any call to the present vacancy, if Mr. Erskine shall be allowed to be on the leet, till once the mind of the Presbytery be obtained on the reasons of the fore-said protestation."

In consequence of this frivolous protest, the Moderator declined proceeding till the Presbytery had an opportunity of discussing its relevancy, alleging that "the objections made against one of the candidates seem to him to be of *great weight and moment*!" Mr. Pitcairn of Dysart, mean time, much to his honour, disapproved of the Moderator's conduct in stopping farther procedure. His disapprobation was founded on these two grounds—that Mr. Robertson, who threw in the paper of objections against Mr. Erskine, was "acting only by virtue of a controverted proxy, who had no concern with or in the parish of Kirkaldy;"—and that nothing in that paper was sufficient to justify the uncommon step the Moderator had taken; for "instead of any thing new against Mr. Erskine, it tells the old story of the Representation," &c. The people too, were highly displeased at this unwarrantable sisting of procedure. "Dunnikeyr,"* it is stated, "protested that this procedure of the Moderator is contrary

* This gentleman is afterwards styled "Mr. James Oswald of Dunnikeyr."

to the practice of the Church and law of the land, and that it may be *leisum* [lawful] to us to present a call to the Presbytery in favour of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine in another form than by a moderation, and therefore took instruments."

Minutely to detail the proceedings in this singular affair, which occupies a great number of pages in the Records both of the Presbytery of Kirkaldy and the Synod of Fife, could conduce but little either to the entertainment or instruction of the reader. Suffice it to notice a few particulars, including the result of the whole.—When the Moderator presented his Report, the Presbytery, "after reasoning, allowed that the Brother might have proceeded in the moderation notwithstanding the objections; but found no reason to condemn the delay, as it proceeded from a principle of caution." At several successive meetings, however, they pertinaciously refused, in despite of the urgent and reiterated solicitations of the people, to appoint a new moderation. For this refusal they found a plausible pretext, particularly in the measures adopted by a certain individual, who was said to have formerly annoyed the good Mr. Wardrope when minister of Kirkaldy, and who now made himself notorious by outrageously opposing Mr. Erskine. This gentleman laid on the Presbytery's table a paper abounding with the most virulent invectives against him; but, like Robertson's protest, founded merely on the affair of the Marrow, and parallel to the calumnious charges adverted to in a foregoing chapter. Mr. Erskine demanded a copy of this abusive paper, expressing at the same time his hope that his Brethren would have the candour to consider this request as not at all indicating his mind relative to

the proposed call. After some delay, the request was complied with; and at a subsequent meeting he read a spirited paper, repelling the aspersions which had been cast upon him, and comprising some strictures on the conduct of his accuser. The accuser, incensed at this retort, presented a formal libel against him; but the moment he laid it on the table, he was himself served with a libel, subscribed by Messrs. *David Sibbald, Andrew Kay, jun.* and several other inhabitants of Kirkaldy, and charging him with “malignant imprecations” against the Rev. Messrs. Bathgate and Erskine, and with various acts of immorality.

At a meeting of Presbytery the 18th June 1724, the commissioners from Kirkaldy solicited the grant of a new moderation, with permission to put Mr. Erskine in the leet. They also laid the draught of a Call to him on the table, craving permission to subscribe it immediately before them. But both these requests being peremptorily denied, they protested and appealed to the Synod of Fife. The Presbytery, too, after spending a number of days at different meetings in a laborious examination of witnesses, at last referred the whole affair of the libels to the Synod, “and earnestly crave that they may take the same into their own hand, and bring it to a final issue.”

The Synod used their endeavours to compose the personal difference which had taken place betwixt Mr. Erskine and W——, of B——. Owing greatly to the forgiving and conciliatory spirit of the former, they succeeded in persuading them to withdraw their libellous papers against each other; and “appointed the Moderator to admonish and exhort them to a Christian behaviour towards one another in time coming.”

The Commissioners from Kirkaldy, however, were foiled in the public cause in which they felt so deeply interested. Having obtained no redress from the Synod, they protested and appealed to the General Assembly which met in May 1725. The Assembly referred the matter to their Commission, with instructions to discuss it at their first meeting. The Commission, therefore, took it under consideration immediately after the rising of Assembly; and, after hearing the parties concerned, including the Rev. Alexander Anderson, a member of the Synod of Fife, whose violent philippic against Mr. Erskine was formerly noticed, they passed a final sentence, which completely thwarted the wishes, and blasted the expectations of the people of Kirkaldy, with regard to Mr. Erskine.

The truth seems to be, that the ruling clergy entertained inveterate prejudices against all the Brethren concerned in the Representation against the Act of Assembly condemning the Marrow, and were determined, to the utmost of their power, to prevent the translation of any one of them to a more conspicuous or influential sphere in the church. Mr. Boston accordingly states, that his physicians having assured him that the air of Ettrick was extremely injurious to his health, he had ground to hope the Church would have removed him to a parish more favourable to his bodily constitution, "till I fell under their displeasure," adds that worthy man, "in the affair of the Marrow, which I reckon to have staked me down in Ettrick."

Mr. Erskine, however, had entertained no wish to be transferred to Kirkaldy, and was neither chafed nor disappointed at the result of the process.—"The town and parish of Kirkaldy," says he, "having cast their eyes

upon me for supplying their present vacancy, contrary to my inclination and earnest entreaty, both in private and public, were pleased to push the design of my transportation to them from one judicatory to another, till it came before the Assembly." "I very heartily acquiesce," he says again, "in the sentence of the Reverend Commission continuing me minister of Portmoak. I adore him who hath the stars in his right hand, who ever fixed me in that corner of his vineyard, where, I hope, I shall have my crown and rejoicing in the day of the Lord. And, therefore, whatever might have been the particular views, either of persons or judicatories, or however unfavourable their sentiments or sentences have been meant, yet, I can freely declare they have not crossed my inclination in that determination: and I have no manner of resentment against the judicatories of the Church on that head, for whom I desire to have all due deference in the Lord."*

Yet such were his acknowledged qualifications for a more eminent sphere than that to which he was at first appointed, that neither the prejudices of offended clergymen, nor his own predilection for Portmoak, could prevent fresh attempts to remove him. Some time after the death of his friend, Mr. M'Gill, of KINROSS, the inhabitants of that town and parish honoured him with a unanimous and urgent call.† On Feb. 8, 1728, when

* Apol. Pref. to Ser. on Rev. iii. 4. pp. iii. iv. vii.

† The author has to acknowledge an inaccuracy respecting the *date* of the call to Kinross in the Memoir prefixed to the Works of Mr. E. Erskine, p. xii. Before consulting the Records of Kirkaldy Presbytery, he had been led to conclude that the call to Kinross preceded the attempt to remove him to Kirkaldy. From

the Rev. Thomas Mair and James Wardlaw laid this call on the Presbytery's table at Kirkaldy, the Moderator offered it to him, but he refused to take it into his hand. At the next meeting of Presbytery, which was held March 7th, the cause was discussed in the usual manner. The answers returned by the people of Portmoak to the reasons for translation, we may notice, discovered at once considerable ability, and a warm attachment to their Pastor. In their reply to one of these reasons, they admit that he is "a person of learning, and gravity, and eminent piety; and, whereas the Commissioners from Kinross commend him for affability and sweetness of temper, which serves to insinuate the exemplary piety of his conduct to all conversant with him, we own the sweetness of his temper, and the mildness of his manners, except in the matters of his God, for whom appearing and against sin, he is all in a holy flame, being very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; and, through the bounty of heaven, he is *above all our eulogies*. He has nothing of his own; and we wish our brethren of Kinross to consider that, though Paul may plant and Apollos water, there cannot be an increase without the divine blessing."

The speech of Mr. Erskine himself was highly favourable to the views of his parishioners. He began by stating, that he "blushed to think the judicatories

those Records too, he first learned that it was not strictly correct to speak of him as having been actually "called to Kirkaldy;" for though the people fully intended, and ardently wished to call him, their call was prevented by the conduct of the Moderator, and the subsequent procedure of the courts. These inaccuracies have been adopted also by another writer, in a short Memoir prefixed to the "Beauties of the Rev. E. E." p. xv.

should have any trouble about an intended removal of him from that spot of the Lord's vineyard where he now laboured; that he had used all imaginable pains, both with the parish of Kinross and the Presbytery of Dunfermline, to prevent its coming to a public hearing; but was now obliged to declare his mind in a public and judicial way." "In a consistency with what has already passed," he added, "I declare myself absolutely against the transportation. Permit me to say, that I have now stood under a pastoral relation to the parish of Portmoak these twenty-four years and upwards; during all which time, they and I have lived together in amity and love. They have been dutiful to me in my ministerial work. As their call was at first unanimous, so at this day there is not a dissenter from my ministry in the whole parish. And, I dare to say, to the praise of sovereign grace, that I have not laboured altogether in vain, or spent my strength for nought. And seeing the pleasure of the Lord is in any small measure prospering among them; and their hearts are knit to me as an instrument however insignificant, I hope this Reverend Presbytery, who fixed my relation to them, will be *very tender* in dissolving it; whereby both their hearts and mine would be grieved to the last degree."

In conformity with Mr. Erskine's own wishes, thus feelingly expressed, the Presbytery unanimously agreed to continue the relation betwixt him and his original charge. The Commissioners from Kinross protested, and appealed to the Synod of Fife; but the Synod, at their meeting 4th April, 1728, unanimously affirmed the sentence of the Presbytery. The disappointed Commissioners thought proper then to appeal to the General Assembly to meet the ensuing May; but the

cause was finally decided against them, "to the great joy of the people of Portmoak."*

After the lapse of three years, nevertheless, this joy was turned into sorrow. A renewed attempt to deprive them of their beloved Pastor proved more successful than any of the five which had been previously made. The town and parish of STIRLING having judged it necessary to obtain another minister to co-operate with the Rev. Messrs. Hamilton and Muir in the labours of the Gospel, and having made a liberal arrangement for his support, fixed their eyes on Mr. Erskine, and gave him a most cordial invitation to settle amongst them. At a meeting of the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, May 27, 1731, several clergymen and gentlemen appeared, including the Rev. Charles Muir, of Stirling, and John Gray, of Dollar, as representatives respectively of the Presbytery of Stirling, and of the Session and burgh of that town; and "Bailie Wingate gave in a Call, subscribed by the magistrates and town-council, and elders of the burgh and congregation of Stirling, with the special advice, and unanimous consent of the whole community thereof, as also with the consent of the present ministers thereof, to the said Mr. Ebenezer Erskine at Portmoak to be one of the ministers of Stirling, duly attested by Mr. William Campbell, minister of Alloa,"† and sustained by the Presbytery of Stirling, the 29th April preceding. "Then they gave in a long paper, subscribed by many heads of families of the said burgh and

* The Portmoak MS. contains a full account of the proceedings relative to the Call from Kinross.

† Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

parish, and duly attested by the said Mr. Campbell, which was also read." After some farther statements, it follows: "Then the Moderator did offer the call to Mr. Erskine, which he desired to lay in the Presbytery's hand." The customary steps were taken to pave the way for the deciding of the cause at next meeting of Presbytery.

The people of Portmoak, meantime, to their great surprise and regret, learned from their minister's caution and reserve on this occasion, that he was not so unwilling to leave them as before. For this alteration in the state of his mind they alleged a variety of reasons. The ravages which death had made among the most estimable members of his session and congregation; some private dissensions that had occurred among his elders; an apparent declension of that ardour with which the people had been accustomed to engage in the exercises of the sanctuary; and the powerful influence which the character and reasonings of the Rev. Mr. Hamilton had on his mind—each of these was assigned as a probable cause of the change. Nor need we wonder to find that it was attributed by some to the wishes and entreaties of a female relative. It was imagined that the second Mrs. Erskine, being a native of Edinburgh, was partial to a large town, and urged her husband to embrace this favourable opportunity of removing from the sequestered village of Portmoak. The truth is, that the fair prospect of more extensive usefulness, added to other circumstances, which he considered as indicating the will of heaven, was, in all probability, the principal cause of his willingness to leave a charge to which he had been so long and so firmly attached. No one, who views with attention or candour, the man-

ner in which he conducted himself on the different previous occasions when his translation was proposed or requested, will impute his present resolution to precipitance or ambition, or to the predominating influence of worldly motives. We have ample ground to conclude that he was prompted by those high considerations which are well stated in a Memoir lately published :

“ A change of destination in the life of a minister,” says the author of that valuable work, “ is at all times a subject of grave consideration. He can take no step, in the consequences of which others are not deeply involved as well as himself. . . . If the glory of God and conversion of immortal souls is the grand object of which, as a minister, he is never to lose sight, nothing less than a deliberate and well-founded conviction that this is likely to be promoted by the step contemplated, ought to determine his removal ; more especially from a scene where his labours have been owned and blessed.”*

At all events, the desired translation took place. At a meeting of Presbytery at Kirkaldy on the 17th June, when the Commissioners from Stirling, including the Rev. Alexander Hamilton, and those from Portmoak, had been fully heard, Mr. Erskine himself made a speech, in which, while he expressed his esteem and affection for his people, he submitted the matter to the determination of the Court ; and, in consequence, when the votes were taken, “ it carried *nem. contrad.*† ‘ Transport ;’ and the Presbytery did, and hereby do

* Grimshawe’s Mem. of the Rev. Legh Richmond, Ch. vi. p. 100. 2d ed.

† Without a dissenting voice.

transport Mr. Erskine from Portmoak to be one of the ministers of Stirling, and recommend his settlement there betwixt and the first Tuesday of September next.* Portmoak was, accordingly, “declared vacant” on the last Sabbath of August; and Mr. Erskine was admitted at Stirling, we believe, on Tuesday the 6th September, 1731.

His farewell sermon at Portmoak was preached from Acts xx. 22. “And now behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there.” “This was a sorrowful day,” says the writer of a manuscript to which we have frequently referred,† “both to him and his people. The retrospect of twenty-eight years of great felicity which were for ever gone, and the uncertainty of what might follow, bathed their faces with tears, and awoke the voice of mourning and woe throughout the congregation, for the loss of a pastor, the constant object of whose ministry was to recommend to their souls the exalted Redeemer in his person, offices, and grace—who had laboured to rouse the inconsiderate to repentance and serious concern; and who had not failed, when religious impressions took place, to preserve and promote them with unwearied diligence. They had always found in him the affection of a father, and brother, and friend. Even when he administered the merited reproof, or sounded the necessary alarm, they knew it flowed from an affectionate heart, which, while lamenting their sins, loved their precious souls. So much was the minister

* Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

† Portmoak MS.

himself affected, that it was with much difficulty he could proceed till he reached the end of the doctrinal part of his discourse, when he was obliged to pause; and, overcome with grief, concluded abruptly, saying, ‘My friends, I find that neither you nor I can bear the application of this subject.’ ”

Notwithstanding the dissolution of the pastoral relation between this affectionate minister and the people of Portmoak, they still cherished for each other a cordial regard. One or two individuals removed with him to Stirling, merely to enjoy the benefit of his ministry. Many more of them wished that circumstances had admitted of a similar removal. All of them continued to regard him with sincere veneration; and his memory is still dear to the hearts of their posterity. Nor did Mr. Erskine fail, on his part, to reciprocate their kindness. He showed particular attention to such of them as came to reside in his neighbourhood. When others had occasion, in the course of business, to make visits to Stirling, he received them with unfeigned cordiality, gave them pious and animating counsels, and made very kind and particular inquiries respecting his old parishioners. As often as his avocations allowed, he visited Portmoak, and refreshed them by his evangelical discourses and friendly attentions. His last visit was made in July 1747, when he had undertaken to give his services on a Sabbath at Kinross. He no sooner appeared than they crowded around him with affectionate eagerness, and entreated him to preach to them before his departure. With this request he cheerfully complied; and, on a Friday, at Easter Balgedie, a village in the parish of Portmoak, delivered an excellent sermon from Psalm

xxv. 9. "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way."

Owing to a variety of difficulties, arising chiefly from the rigorous enforcement of the law of patronage, Portmoak continued vacant for several years, after sustaining the loss of Mr. Erskine. At last a Mr. *Robert Douglas* was ordained there in May 1735, who was removed by death in 1742. He was succeeded by Mr. *John Mudie*, who was settled in September 1743; and whose son, Mr. *John Mudie*, was in summer 1754 appointed his assistant and successor.*

From the first rise of the Secession, in which Mr. Erskine acted so prominent a part, a considerable proportion of his old hearers at Portmoak espoused that cause, and became members of the Associate congregations formed in several adjacent parishes, as Kinross, Orwell, and Leslie. No congregation, however, of that communion, so far as we know, was erected within the bounds of the parish of Portmoak till about the year 1800, when a place of worship was built at Balgedie. The late Rev. *William Gibson*, the first pastor of the people assembling in that house, whose excellent talents, endearing dispositions, and truly Christian deportment, will long be remembered by his people and his friends; was ordained in August 1811, and died the 15th Jan. 1829.†

The importance of the new sphere of exertion as-

* Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

† See an interesting account of Mr. Gibson, composed by one of his hearers. *Theol. Mag.* vol. iv. pp. 398-402.

signed to Mr. Erskine is obvious. Distinguished alike for its beautiful and romantic scenery, its high antiquity, its ancient honours as the residence of kings, and its prominence in many of the most remarkable events of the Scottish history,—STIRLING is viewed by strangers as well as by the natives of Scotland, with feelings of the liveliest interest. Its population too, though limited in comparison of many other Scotch towns, has for ages been deemed sufficient to occupy the labours of several clergymen. By the return made to Dr. Webster in 1755, the number of souls in the parish was 3951. Most probably too, the number fell little or nothing short of this at the time of Mr. Erskine's admission ; for nearly forty years since, it was affirmed by a clergyman who had the best opportunities of ascertaining the fact, that, "till of late, it has undergone very little change, either in size or population, for the last 600 years.* The charge of Stirling, we are informed by the same writer, was made collegiate in the year 1651. About a hundred years since, when the inhabitants resolved, as we have seen, to have a third minister, it was determined to give him the West Church, which, according to tradition, was built by James V. for the accommodation of some Franciscan friars ; but which, till that time had, subsequently to the Reformation, been very rarely occupied as a place of worship.

This then was the Church appropriated to Mr. Erskine ; and here he continued to publish the glad tidings of salvation till May 1740, when his connexion

* See Account of the Town and Parish of Stirling, by the late Rev. Dr. Sommerville, *Statist. Acc. of Scotland*, vol. viii. pp. 271-296.

with the national establishment was finally dissolved.—The cause of vital religion was happily no novelty at Stirling. While he was called, no doubt, to address many inconsiderate hearers, who were ignorant of themselves and the Saviour, he had also the joy of promoting the spiritual comfort and progress of a considerable number to whom the ministrations of faithful men who preceded him had been effectually blessed. Not to mention the celebrated JAMES GUTHRIE and others, who flourished in earlier times, we find that, betwixt 1694 and the period of Mr. Erskine's admission, the following ministers had finished their earthly career—Messrs. Robert Rule, John Forrester, James Brisbane, and Archibald M'Aulay.

Among these clergymen, Mr. BRISBANE, who died in the year 1724, seems to have been particularly distinguished for piety, diligence, and soundness in the faith. He ministered first in the parish of Kilmalcolm, Renfrewshire, and was thence translated to Stirling. He acknowledged himself greatly indebted to his colleague, Mr. Hamilton, for leading him to more clear and evangelical views of the Christian system than he had originally held. Mr. Boston numbers him among the “noted preachers of the doctrine of free grace,”* and describes him as warmly attached to the Twelve Brethren who joined in the Representation respecting the condemnation of the Marrow. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine calls him “an eminent labourer,” and Mr. Ralph commends him as “a worthy and great divine.” The utility of his labours has been acknowledged, among others, by *Elizabeth Cairns*, a pious inhabitant

* Memoirs, Per. xi. p. 361.

of Stirling, in whose Memoirs it is stated, that she was much comforted and edified under Mr. Brisbane's ministry.

At the time of Mr. Erskine's translation to Stirling, the Rev. Charles Muir and Alexander Hamilton were the ministers of the East Church there ; and both of them were esteemed decidedly conscientious and evangelical. Both are mentioned by Mr. Boston as zealous friends to the pure Gospel.*

Mr. HAMILTON, in particular, was a distinguished character. From his youth he feared God above many ; and amid the infirmities of age he continued to discover an unabated ardour in his Master's cause. He laboured first for six years in the small parish of *Ecclesmachan*, county of Linlithgow ; then for twenty-six years in *Airth*, on the south banks of the Forth ; and in February 1726, he was translated to Stirling, where he prosecuted his ministry with faithfulness and success till the 29th January 1738, when, after a short illness, he entered into his Master's joy in the 76th year of his age. Such were his zeal and courage in the days of youth, that one winter when attending the University of Edinburgh, influenced by a just regard to the memory of Mr. James Guthrie, he took down, with his own hand, at the hazard of his life, the head of that good man, from the top of the Netherbow gate of the city ; where, for a long series of years it had been exposed as a public spectacle. In the year 1714 he published a Catechism on Gospel Doctrine and the Sacraments, in which the grace of the new cove-

* Memoirs, Per. xi. p. 370. Mr. Muir died very soon after Mr. Erskine's translation.

nant, the difference betwixt the law and the Gospel, and the unconditional exhibition of the Saviour to sinners, are correctly stated. From his known attachment to the doctrine of grace, he incurred the displeasure of the dominant clergy to such a degree, that, along with other three excellent ministers, he was arraigned before the Committee of Assembly for purity of doctrine, which met in Edinburgh April 1719.* A few years before his death, too, he gave them fresh offence by faithfully protesting against the intrusion of Mr. *James Mackie* into the parish of St. Ninians. To these circumstances, as highly creditable to his character, Ebenezer Erskine alludes in the following terms :

“ My Reverend Father, Mr. Hamilton, has been [at different times] led forth to contend for his glorious Master. He gave him a banner some years ago which he was helped to display for the doctrine of free grace, in opposition to the current of legalism which then prevailed; and now again in his declining years, before he take him off the field of battle, he has led him forth as a witness for the liberties wherewith he has made his people free, particularly that valuable branch of Christian liberty which hath been so much invaded of late, the freedom of Christian congregations to elect pastors and overseers of their souls.”†

Mr. Ralph Erskine, also, in more than one of his sermons, makes honourable allusions to the memory of Mr. Hamilton; and, at the request of some of his friends, he composed a long Elegiac Poem, partly in

* Boston's Memoirs, Per. xi. p. 361.

† Testimony and Contendings of the Rev. Mr. Alexander Hamilton against the violent Settlement of Mr. James Mackie. Preface by Ebenezer Erskine, dated Stirling, September 4, 1735.

English and partly in Latin, in which he celebrates his piety, orthodoxy, meekness, fortitude, and other virtues, and notices the principal events of his life.*

To have men of this description for his colleagues was a great felicity to Mr. Erskine. Nor was he less happy in most of the brethren with whom he now corresponded at sacramental solemnities, as the Rev. Messrs. STEVENSON of Glendovan, LINDSAY of Bothkennar, BONAR of Torphichen, KIDD of Queensferry, and WARDEN of Gargunnoch.†

Marked esteem and affection were shown to him at his entrance into Stirling, when he came to take part in the oversight of souls in that town. He was met, it is said, at the far-famed Bridge by his two colleagues, Messrs. Muir and Hamilton, by the ruling Elders, and by the flower of the Christian people, who all united in hailing his arrival, and giving him a cordial welcome.

At the commencement of his labours in this new and interesting sphere, his mind appears to have been deeply impressed; and, while aware of the importance and difficulty of the work assigned to him, past experience of the divine aid powerfully encouraged him to place an unsuspecting reliance on the promise of strength and sufficiency equal to his day. On the first Sabbath after his admission he allowed the congregation to con-

* See this Elegy among the Miscellaneous Poems at the close of Mr. R. Erskine's Works.

† For some notices of these excellent Ministers, see Gospel Truth, pp. 132-3, 340, 343-4, 348. See also in pp. 345-6 an account of another devout and evangelical brother, with whom Mr. Erskine corresponded before, and perhaps also after his translation, viz. Mr. ALEXANDER WARDROPE, who was minister first at Muckhart, and afterwards at Whitburn.

tinue singing considerably longer than usual, before he rose to offer up the first prayer. Some of his elders, who had observed the circumstance, and apprehended that it was the consequence of indisposition, when they saw him next day, made kind inquiries respecting his health. He told them, however, with the frankness which usually characterized his intercourse with those in whose piety and friendship he had confidence, that his delaying so long to stand up was owing to no bodily complaint; "but the days of grace he had enjoyed at Portmoak came afresh to his remembrance, with these words, 'I am the God of Bethel;' and his mind was so overpowered that he scarcely knew how to rise."

Thus cheerfully depending on the faithful promises of that God whom he served, he exerted himself in his new situation with exemplary diligence. In performing the public and private duties of his office at Stirling, he maintained the same excellent spirit, which, as we have seen in a former chapter, he discovered at Portmoak; and probably observed the same modes and forms—only varying his manner a little, as the diversity of circumstances seemed to require, or growing experience served to direct. Disdaining every suggestion of indolence, he applied himself with renewed vigour to the labours of reading and study, and of writing discourses. No doubt he availed himself occasionally of his former manuscripts; and a few texts which he had found singularly beneficial to others, or peculiarly sweet to his own soul, as Exod. xx. 2. and Job xix. 25. were, on proper occasions, repeatedly resumed. But the numerous productions of his pen, still extant, bear undeniable testimony to his great and persevering industry.

Besides, at least, six volumes "on Catechetical Doctrine," written at Portmoak betwixt 1717 and 1723 inclusive, he has left, in all, forty-seven Note-books of evangelical, sacramental, and miscellaneous sermons; *fifteen* of which books were composed subsequently to his translation to Stirling. Most of them consist of about 220 pages; and all of them, with the exception of a few words in common-hand interspersed, are written in short-hand characters. Each may contain, on an average, about thirty-six sermons of an hour's length. He left also, several volumes of expository discourses, including a series of lectures on the epistle to the Hebrews, studied and delivered immediately after his admission to his second charge. By far the greater part of these various manuscripts have been in our hands; and, were it requisite, we could specify the numerous texts and subjects to which he called the attention of his hearers. But the specimens which have been long in the possession of the Christian public may be deemed sufficient.

His published sermons comprise, we observe, amongst others delivered at Stirling, four that were preached immediately before the administration of the Lord's Supper on the following topics—"Human nature preferred to the angelical,"—"The wise virgins going forth to meet the Bridegroom,"—"Christ set up from everlasting,"—"Ethiopia stretching out her hands to God."

The assistance he received in his Master's work on particular occasions, as well as in the usual routine of service, often called forth the cordial acknowledgments of a grateful heart. Thus in a manuscript entitled "Book 42d of Miscellany Sermons, 8th book in Stir-

ling," begun March 23, 1738, he thus records his experience of the divine goodness :

"*Saturday, May 20*, I preached before my Lords DUN and STRICHEN—Circuit, upon the following text ; and the Lord helped, as he has done hitherto : Rev. i. 7. 'Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him,' " &c.—At the close of a few jottings it is added, "*Nota*, I had not time to write, having come home on Friday forenoon from the Associate Presbytery at Abbotshall, 1738."

Of the assiduity and faithfulness with which Mr. Erskine, in connection with his much esteemed colleague Mr. Hamilton, discharged the private duties of his office, we have an authentic memorial in a paper published by the Associate Presbytery in 1739.* Early in the year 1737, as appears from that document, "the two ministers of Stirling, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Erskine, in order to prevent the profanation of the Table of the Lord, formed a resolution to examine, privately, all that should be admitted, and to appoint diets for that effect." They determined at the same time, with the concurrence of a large majority of the Session, to read from the pulpit an advertisement with respect to intended communicants—giving notice that none should apply for admission to that ordinance, who were ignorant of the first principles of religion, or hostile to the distinguishing tenets of the Church of Scotland, or habi-

* Remarks on the Libel executed against the ministers of the Assoc. Presb. by order from the General Assembly 1738. Re-exhibition, pp. 201, 202.

tually negligent of secret and family worship, or who absented themselves without a sufficient apology from public worship, or from diets of catechising, or that were ungodly and immoral in their practice.

One of Mr. Erskine's Note-books contains a list of "Memoranda of things anent the Sacrament to be celebrated in Stirling the 3d Sabbath of July, 1739 ;"—among which occurs the following memorandum, alluding to the private examination formerly conducted by Mr. Hamilton and himself :

"Remember to intimate that, whereas it is impracticable for me now, when left alone, to venture upon a private examination of all that are to be admitted to the Lord's table, as was done the last time, when my worthy colleague, now in glory, was with me ; therefore, I can now adventure only upon the private examination of Young Communicants, or such as were not admitted the last time we had the ordinance dispensed in this place. And, therefore, such of this congregation as incline to partake of this ordinance, who were never admitted before, may come to my house on Wednesday and Thursday, when I shall endeavour to attend on them from 4 to 8 at night."

The high popularity which this faithful minister had previously acquired suffered no abatement, but, on the contrary, increased, after his translation to Stirling ; and, what was more gratifying to him, as well as infinitely more important in itself, his ministrations, by the powerful blessing of God, were rendered truly and extensively useful. A course of sermons he preached in the year 1735, on Christ as the Foundation laid in Zion, proved the means of conversion and edification to

many.* The memoirs of a private Christian, eminent for piety and good sense, supply one of the numerous examples of the happy effects arising from his labours. —“I went for ordinary to Stirling,” says *Alexander Archibald*, “where the Gospel was preached with great purity and simplicity by Mr. Ebenezer Erskine ; which tended much to acquaint me with, and establish me in the faith once delivered to the saints.”†

We have another instance of his usefulness, which must not be passed over in silence. A young man, about twenty years of age, had come from the Highlands to serve in the labours of the field in the vicinity of Alloa. His master was a cordial lover of the Gospel, and frequently took his highland servant with him to Stirling, to hear Mr. Erskine. The young man at last felt the salutary power of the truth ; and having applied about the year 1740 for the privileges of full communion, was, after examination, admitted to the Lord’s table.

In choosing rather to go to Stirling than to worship in the parish church of Alloa, he was influenced not merely by the interesting doctrine and manner of the preacher, but also by the spirit which the hearers discovered. When he sat in the gallery allotted to servants in the church of Alloa, “before public worship began, nothing was heard but the news of the country, and the idle chit-chat of the past week ; but when he went to Stirling, or returned from it, the savour of Christ’s knowledge was diffused all around. They took

* Gospel-Truth, p. 58.

† See “The Experience of A. Archibald,” which was first published at Edinburgh, 1766, and has undergone several subsequent impressions.

sweet counsel as they went to the house of God in company. This made him conclude that there was more of Christ among the one sort of people than among the other."

After his return to the Highlands, he retained his attachment to the Gospel, and to the cause of the Secession. Previously to the erection of a Seceding congregation at Comrie, he and his wife were accustomed, "almost every Sabbath in summer, to travel all the way from Lochearne to Kinkell, about eighteen English miles," to hear the late Mr. Muckersie, whose ministry was dear and profitable to him. From his manifest integrity of mind, and primitive simplicity of manners, he obtained among some ministers of his acquaintance the name of *Nathanael*. He was much given to prayer, and, with peculiar earnestness, interceded for the prosperity and enlargement of the Church. Moved by Christian compassion for the inconsiderate and ignorant in that part of the country where he resided, he travelled many a dark night to read practical books to them, or to lend them for perusal.

About the year 1780, his regard to the cause of Christ was put to a severe test, when his son, whom he dearly loved, and to whom he had given education for the ministry, was appointed to Nova Scotia by the late General Associate Synod. "Though he felt all the yearnings of an affectionate father over an only son, he cheerfully acquiesced; and rejoiced that he had a son honoured to carry the Gospel to these dark places of the earth. Nothing gave him greater joy than the accounts he received from Pictou of the success of the Gospel."

This good man died at *Portmore* in the parish of Com-

rie, on the 8th January, 1801, aged 84 years and upwards. His end was peace. With his dying breath he expressed his confidence in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. His name was *James Macgregor*.* The son, whom, like another Isaac, this pious father, emulating the faith of Abraham, cheerfully surrendered at the call of God, is the truly venerable JAMES MACGREGOR, D.D. of Pictou, who has long exercised his ministry with distinguished ability, faithfulness, and zeal; and whose labours have been signally blessed to many of the poor Scottish Highlanders, who were compelled by dire necessity to emigrate to that distant province.

Who can calculate the amount to which a single instance of conversion by the preaching of the Gospel may ultimately grow? It is only when the great day of judgment shall arrive, that it will be possible to perceive the whole beauty and extent of the valuable fruit which has resulted from the efforts of the faithful servant of Jesus Christ, who has been honoured to sow "an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountain."

We shall defer what remains to be told respecting the prosecution and success of Mr. Erskine's ministry at Stirling, till we have detailed the particulars of his conduct in that interesting public cause which attracted universal attention in Scotland, shortly after his translation to that town.

* For these particulars respecting this follower of Christ, we are indebted to the *Christian Mag.* vol. v. pp. 107-9. The signature taken by the writer of the account is G. which, probably, means the late Rev. Samuel Gilfillan, Comrie.

CHAPTER VIII.

SKETCH OF PARTICULARS REGARDING THE RISE OF
THE SECESSION.

Remote causes of this event—Mr. Erskine's first indications of zeal for religious liberty—Opposes a settlement by patronage at Ballingry in 1717—Unites with others in remonstrating against the Act of Assembly respecting vacant parishes, 1732—Complained of for expressions in his sermon at Perth, before the Synod of Perth and Stirling, and declared censurable—His protest and appeal to the General Assembly 1733—Unfavourable sentence of that court—Protest by the Four Brethren—Proceedings of the Commission against them in August and November—Their constituting themselves into a Presbytery at Gairney-bridge in December—Conciliatory measures of the Assembly 1734—The seceding ministers decline to accede—Their appearance, when summoned to reply to a Libel, before the Assembly 1739—Their deposition by that court 1740—Attestations to the character of Mr. Erskine—His integrity, fortitude, and ability in maintaining the cause he had espoused—Aspersions cast upon his conduct.

THE Secession is regarded both by its friends and its enemies as a highly important event in the history of the Church of Scotland. However slight and accidental the circumstances by which it was immediately occasioned may appear, it unquestionably arose from a

general state of matters in the Church, naturally tending towards such a crisis. Divine providence, whose operations are often apparently slow, but always sure and progressive, had been gradually paving the way for an open division, calculated, notwithstanding all its accompanying evils, to prevent the utter extinction of religious principle and freedom in the land, and to advance the interests of truth and piety. A torrent of corruption, which threatened the overthrow of every thing sacred in doctrine and valuable in privilege, was proceeding to so great a height, that enlightened and conscientious men were impressed with the necessity of bold and decisive steps.

The prevalence of those erroneous tenets and oppressive measures, which gave rise to the Secession, may be traced back to the defects attending the settlement of ecclesiastical affairs at the era of the Revolution 1688. That era was truly glorious ; and in no quarter of the British empire were its blessings more necessary, or more sensibly experienced, than in Scotland. Religious, as well as civil rights and liberties, were then restored to a nation, which, under the tyrannical sway of Charles II. and James VII., had been most cruelly degraded and oppressed. Episcopacy was abolished ; the Presbyterian worship and government re-established ; pastors who had been ejected from their churches in 1661 were replaced ; and the law of patronage, though not absolutely annulled, was so modified, and, in consequence, so gently administered, that it was scarcely felt as a grievance.

But while the Scottish Presbyterians had much cause for gratitude and joy, they had at the same time seve-

ral sources of regret.* The omission of an Act formally asserting Christ's *sole headship* over the Church, and expressly condemning the royal supremacy which had been assumed under the two preceding reigns, was deeply lamented. Nor was it an inconsiderable evil, that, in compliance with the wishes of the Court, about three hundred of the Prelatical incumbents, some of whom had even been active agents in the work of persecution, were, "upon easy terms," permitted to retain their stations in the parishes of Scotland, and to sit in the ecclesiastical courts. Attached, in many instances, to unscriptural doctrines, no less than to Episcopalian forms of worship and discipline, these men could not fail to obstruct the efforts of those faithful ministers who attempted to promote the cause of evangelical truth and practical religion. Among those ministers themselves, there were comparatively few who displayed all that magnanimity and zeal which the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom required; and the exercise of which, on that momentous occasion, might have proved incalculably advantageous to vital Christianity in their own days, and in succeeding ages. Owing to the pusillanimity of some clergymen, and the waywardness of others, lamentable symptoms of degeneracy in principle and practice were discernible within a short period after the happy Revolution. The worthy HALYBURTON accordingly, amid the triumphant expressions of Christian faith and hope,

* See Testimony of the United Assoc. Syn. pp. 24-30, and Memoirs of the Public Life of Mr. James Hogg, and of the Ecclesiastical proceedings of his time. See a sketch of the principles of the Old Dissenters from the Revolution Church, and the treatment they met with, in Struthers' Hist. of Scot. vol. i. Book i.

which he uttered on his death-bed in 1712, deplored in the strongest terms “the growing apostacy” of the times, and, in particular, that indifference to the peculiarities of the Gospel and to the power of godliness, which prevailed among a great proportion of the clergy. He exclaimed, for example, “Oh that the ministry of Scotland may be kept from destroying the Church of Scotland. Oh that I could obtain it of them with tears of blood, to be concerned for the Church! Shall we be drawn away from the precious Gospel, and from Christ?”*

It is not our design to illustrate particularly the gradual progress of error and declension in those times, nor fully to point out the manner in which the state of religion was affected by the political events and ecclesiastical transactions that occurred. The revival of the law of patronage, the imposition of the oath of abjuration, the Marrow controversy, and the way in which several processes for error before the General Assembly were conducted and terminated,—exercised a powerful influence, as appears in some measure from the details in a preceding Chapter, on the purity, peace, and prosperity of the national church. The seeds of disunion were widely sown; both light and darkness rose to a degree that was once unknown;† and a palpable line

* *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton*, p. 247. 9th ed.

† Mr. Boston, after noticing the “good effects” of the Marrow controversy, adds: “Meanwhile it is not to be doubted, but others have, on that occasion, been carried further to the side of legalism than they were before; and that through the prevalence of their passions and prejudices. . . . So that I believe the light and the darkness are both come to a pitch that they were before far from in this church.” *Memoirs*, p. 380.

of demarcation was drawn betwixt two parties among the clergy, opposed to each other in sentiment, spirit, and conduct. The one of these parties consisted of men warmly attached to the pure doctrines of the Gospel, and inclined to vindicate, with ardour, the liberties of the Christian people. The other was composed of those who manifested a cold indifference, or visible hostility, to various articles of faith, and stood prepared, either with a ruthless hand entirely to abolish the rights of the people in the choice of their pastors, or tamely to acquiesce in measures by which they were infringed.

The subject of these memoirs held a conspicuous place in the first of these two opposite classes. We have already seen his decided attachment to purity of doctrine in the appearances he made during the agitation of the contest respecting the Marrow, and the prosecution of Professor Simson. *His zeal for the religious rights of the people was equally distinguished.*

This excellent feature of his character was discovered many years before it proved the occasion of his ejection from the national church. A person well acquainted with the history of his ministry in the parish of Portmoak, describes his mode of appointing ruling Elders among his parishioners in the following terms :

“Animated by the love of civil and religious liberty, he approved and practised the Scriptural method of electing Elders, by the suffrages of church members. This he adhered to at an early period of his ministry in Portmoak.”*

In common with all true friends of the Church of

* Portmoak MS.

Scotland, he bitterly regretted the restoration of patronage by the Act of Queen Anne, 1712—an act originating in bigotry and crooked policy, and not less contrary to the treaty of Union between Scotland and England 1707, than to the enactment 1690, soon after the glorious Revolution. As a member of the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, he heartily concurred in the explicit declarations made by this court in favour of the spiritual rights infringed by that perfidious act; and he showed greater decision and consistency than most other members, in following up these avowals by corresponding procedure. At a meeting of Presbytery, Dec. 25, 1712, in order to prevent unfavourable interpretations of what they had done, when a presentation by her Majesty was laid on their table, they unanimously agreed to declare “that Patronage has been a great grievance to this Church, and is so to this day.” Their views and intentions respecting it are more fully expressed in the following extract:

“*At Dysart, August 13, 1713.*

“The Presbytery of Kirkaldy, taking under serious consideration that, by the late act of Parliament restoring Patronages, occasion is given to a grievous encroachment upon that comely Gospel order of ministerial calls, or elections; and, lest any countenance we give to presentations in that case be construed a receding from the avowed principles of this Church, handed down by our worthy ancestors ever since the Reformation, we do then most cheerfully, and with one consent, **DECLARE** that the relation of pastor and people is plainly founded upon the election, choice, or free consent of a parish thus calling. Next, that the whole extent of patronage power reacheth only the benefice, or legal

stipend, without regard to that sacred office. Accordingly, presentations bear no other part in the settlement of a Gospel minister, than the private consent of the patron, as heritor, or the like, together with his transferring a right to the legal maintenance. And, consequential hereto, we do resolve, whatever presentations may offer, to go into no settlement, but where the people's freedom of electing their minister is maintained, and made legally, and sufficiently evident to us.”*

Notwithstanding this solemn declaration, when the parish of Ballingry became vacant by the death of Mr. Wardrope, the Presbytery proceeded to settle it by presentation, in opposition to the general voice of the people. But that settlement was strongly disapproved and opposed by Mr. Erskine. He and the Rev. Mr. Clow, of Leslie, having been appointed to moderate in the Call at Ballingry, the 26th Nov. 1717, he thought proper to give the people a word of exhortation regarding their duty on that occasion. Accordingly, on one of the boards of a Note-book written that year, we find what he styles “A little Speech at the Moderation of a Call at Ballingry.” The tenor of this speech is to point out the importance of the business for which they were met; to exhort them to be faithful to Christ, and to their own souls, in fixing their choice; to watch against being influenced by undue regard to men; and to keep in remembrance the apostolic injunction, “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.”—Mr. Erskine and his assistant, on account of “the paucity of those concurring” in the Call subscribed that

* Rec. of Kirk. Presb.

day, refused to attest it, and referred the matter to the Presbytery.

When the Presbytery met at Kirkaldy, the 28th Nov. the call was sustained ; but “ Mr. Currie desired it might be marked, that he voted *Not sustain*, in regard there are so few hands at the Call, as the minutes bear.” The following extract from the Records relates to what took place at the next meeting :

“ *Kirkaldy, Dec. 26, 1717.*

“ This day, after reading the minute of the Presbytery anent the affair of Ballingry, Mr. Erskine desired it might be marked, that in regard he was not present when the vote passed in the affair of Ballingry, sustaining Mr. Robert Balfour’s call, that he this day dissents from the Presbytery’s sentence in that matter ; 1. For the reason already suggested in Mr. Currie’s dissent. 2. Because he judges this deed of the Presbytery inconsistent with a registered resolution, or deed, of the Reverend Presbytery, *Anno* 1713, declaring that they will go into no settlement of any congregation, where the free election of the people is not maintained, and made legally evident : which is not in the present case, where the whole body of the congregation decline their concurrence, as is evident from the minutes of the meeting at that moderation. 3. Because he judges that this decision of the Presbytery doth also interfere with an Act of the Synod of Fife about settlements, since the Act of patronage. And *lastly*, because of the fatal effects this settlement, in all probability, will produce, in renting and breaking that congregation.”

The people having protested against the decision of the Presbytery and appealed to the Synod, the call was set aside, and a new moderation appointed. Two calls

were then given, one in favour of the Presentee, and another in favour of Mr. James Thomson, who was afterwards settled at Burntisland. After hot disputes and considerable delays, the call to Mr. Balfour was ultimately sustained by a majority of votes, and his ordination took place the 25th March 1719. It appears, however, from the records, that Messrs. Pitcairn, Erskine, Currie, Bonthorn, and Clow, took no part in the transactions of that day.

At the close of one of the meetings held at Ballingry during the course of these proceedings, the clergymen present were invited to dinner by Sir John Malcolm, the patron of the parish; but resenting the firm opposition given by Mr. Erskine to his views, he thus addressed him: "Mr. Erskine, you are none of us to-day." To this repulsive intimation he instantly replied with becoming spirit, "Sir John, you do me great honour. It gives me the truest pleasure that in this we are agreed; for I scorn to be one of them who dare to oppress the Christian people, and to rob them of their just privileges."*

These noble sentiments were deeply seated in his breast, and he possessed the courage to assert them on every proper occasion. With all other friends of religion and liberty, he rejoiced at the Act of Parliament passed 1719, declaring that presentations should be of no effect, if the individuals presented do not accept, or declare their willingness to accept of the presentations given them. It was generally understood that this limitation was equivalent to an express repealing of the

* Portmoak MS.

law of patronage. For some time after the passing of the act no minister or preacher ventured to accept a presentation; and vacant churches were settled by means of a call from the parish without annoyance from patrons. After the lapse of a few years, however, this scrupulosity was entirely laid aside. Young men were again encouraged to avow their acceptance of presentations; violent settlements were often effected; and the ruling clergy were accused of manifesting a decided resolution to wreath about the necks of the people that galling yoke from which the legislature had shown a disposition to relieve them.

A notorious instance of this intolerance occurred in the proceedings of the Assembly 1731-2. It was an established regulation that if the patron of a vacant parish suffered six months to elapse without exercising his right of presentation, the presbytery to which it belonged was empowered to take steps for its settlement. To prevent Presbyteries in such cases from yielding to the inclinations of the people, and by this means keeping alive the spirit of liberty, an overture was laid before the Assembly 1731, proposing that when the settlement of a vacant parish devolved on the Presbytery, the power of election should be vested in a conjunct meeting of Heritors and Elders, and that all heritors should have the right of voting, Roman Catholics excepted. This overture was remitted to the subordinate judicatories, that their judgment respecting it might be given at the next meeting of Assembly; and though a great majority of those Presbyteries, which gave any opinion on the subject, either expressed their unqualified disapprobation of the measure, or re-

quested that it might undergo essential alterations, the Assembly 1732 most unwarrantably adopted the overture.

The impolicy of this precipitate and obnoxious measure was aggravated by the arrogant and contemptuous manner in which its opponents were treated. The overture had created a general ferment in the country. Many of its most respectable inhabitants, both clergy and laity, attempted, by their active and zealous exertions, to stem the tide of defection, and to induce the Assembly to retrace its steps. A representation of grievances, consisting of twelve heads, with a petition for redress, signed by forty-two ministers and several elders, was presented to this General Assembly;* but the court refused even to *hear* the paper; while a separate complaint and petition to the same effect, subscribed by upwards of fifteen hundred people, met with a similar or still more indignant reception.

Ebenezer Erskine was not only one of the subscribers of the Representation of grievances, but being a member of Assembly that year, one of fifteen who protested against its rejection. Concurring with those members who dissented from the act adopting the above overture relative to the settlement of vacant parishes, he boldly urged the marking of their dissent in the records of the court. We have had the satisfaction to find, in one of his Note-books, in his own short-hand characters, a copy of a speech which he delivered at this interesting juncture. It is as follows:

* This Representation, with the names of the subscribers, may be seen in Struthers' Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. pp. 599-610.

“ An extempore Speech I had in open Assembly when the Overture anent the planting of churches was passed into an act by the Assembly, May 16, 1732.

“ MODERATOR,

“ I find, by the reading of the minutes, that the Dissent that was entered yesterday by some members of the Assembly is not marked ; and I crave that it may be marked, it being a privilege common in every free country. Moderator, the reason why I insist that it may be marked is, that I consider this act of Assembly to be without warrant from the word of God, and inconsistent with the acts and constitution of this church since our Reformation, particularly in our Books of Discipline. As I said before in the Assembly, viz. in the case of Kinross, so, Moderator, I now say it again : I know of no ecclesiastical authority under heaven, but what is derived from Christ, the exalted King of Zion. It is in his name and authority that we are met and constituted in a national Assembly. He is the alone Foundation that God hath laid in Zion. His righteousness is the foundation of our justification and acceptance before God ; and his authority as a King, is the alone foundation of all church government and discipline—laws and acts that are to be imposed upon his church. And in regard I do not see upon what part of the word this act is founded, I therefore conclude, that it wants the authority of Christ, and that the Assembly, in this particular, has gone off from the true foundation of government.

“ We are charged with the custody and feeding of his lambs, his sheep, his little ones. It is not the world’s great ones, or rich ones, that we are entrusted with. No, Moderator ; and yet by this act, the privilege of his little

ones is conferred upon heritors, and the great ones of the world. I am so far from thinking this act conferring the power upon heritors beyond other men, to come and choose ministers of the Gospel, to be founded on the word, that I consider it diametrically contrary to it. What difference does a piece of land make between man and man in the affairs of Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world? Are we not commanded in the word to do nothing by partiality? whereas here is the most manifest partiality in the world. We must have "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," or the privileges of his church, "without respect of persons;" whereas by this act we show respect to the man with the gold ring and the gay clothing, beyond the man with the vile raiment and poor attire. I conceive, Moderator, that our public managements and acts should run in the same channel with God's way, not diverging. We are told that "God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith." It is not said, he hath chosen the heritors of this world, as we have done; but he hath "chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." And if they be "heirs of the kingdom," I wish to know by what warrant they are stript of the privileges of the kingdom.

"Moderator, I consider that by this act, the Assembly have sunk one of the principal branches of our Reformation, inserted in our Books of Discipline; I mean the right of the Church and members thereof to choose their own pastors—a privilege with the custody of which we are entrusted. Our worthy forefathers handed down this among other branches of the Reformation, at the expense of their blood and treasure. And that I may not be accessory to the betraying of a trust, which

we are obliged to hand down in safety to our posterity, and the generation following, *I insist that my dissent may be marked in the Records of this Assembly.*"

The omission complained of at the beginning of this speech, however unjust and unconstitutional in itself, was in full accordance with the mode of proceeding which had been recently adopted. The prevailing party, galled by the faithful testimonies which many ministers were accustomed to bear against their conduct, had, in 1730, caused an act to be hastily passed by the Assembly, without previously consulting the Presbyteries, nay, within a few minutes after it was first proposed, prohibiting in future the recording of the reasons of Dissent against the determinations of church judicatories. The dissents of the preceding day, therefore, and this new remonstrance by Mr. Erskine, were equally disregarded.

It was his determination, nevertheless, at all hazards, to support the cause of truth, and the rights of conscience, by every lawful method it was in his power to employ. Precluded from recording his disapprobation of prevailing evils in the minutes of the Courts, he deemed it his necessary duty to testify against them in his public ministrations; and an indiscreet attempt to restrain all such instances of ministerial faithfulness, by making an example of this noted individual, was the circumstance which immediately gave birth to the Secession.

Although the particulars of this memorable event have been detailed at large in various publications,*

* The publications referred to, are chiefly as follows:—The True State of the Process against Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, The

some account of it is no doubt indispensable in a life of Mr. Erskine. Let the following statements suffice.

Sincerely grieved at the measures adopted by the General Assembly in May 1732, he embraced an early opportunity of exonerating his conscience in the pulpit. Within a few days after the rising of the Court, he exposed the tendency of their arbitrary acts in a sermon preached at Stirling, on the evening of Sabbath, June 4th, from Isaiah ix. 6. "And the government shall be upon his shoulders."* This remonstrance, however, did not appear to him sufficient. Having been appointed Moderator of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, of which he had lately become a member, it fell to his share to open their meeting, at Perth, on the 10th of October following; and in his sermon, on that occasion, having chosen for his text Psalm cxviii. 24. he expressed himself with great freedom against the growing defections in doctrine and government; and, in particular, against the rigorous execution of the law of patronage, and the act of the preceding assembly respecting the settlement of vacant churches.

These faithful remonstrances could not be endured.

Representations of Messrs. E. Erskine, &c. to the Commission of the General Assembly, Gibb's Display of the Secession Testimony, vol. i. The Re-exhibition of the Testimony, Testimony of the United Associate Synod, Brown's History of the Secession, Patison's Preface to the first edition of M'Ewen's Essays, Jaffray's Essay on the Reasons of Secession from the National Church of Scotland, Encyclopædia Britan. Art. *Seceder*, Struthers' Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. Book vii. vol. ii. Book viii., and Ferrier's Memoirs of the Rev. William Wilson, A. M.

* This Sermon, as well as the one preached before the Synod of Perth and Stirling, is published in his Works, Vol. I.

They were exceedingly offensive to a number of his reverend hearers. The Court was scarcely constituted, when they proceeded to complain aloud of the Moderator's discourse, and to urge the appointment of a committee to converse with him, and to report. The proposal was made by Mr. Adam Ferguson of Logierait,* and immediately supported by Mr. James Mercer of Aberdalgie, Mr. James Mackie, then at Forteviot, afterwards at St. Ninians, and by Mr. Robert C——, of Glendoig, Advocate, Elder, “a man that follows the fashion of the present time.”† Three days were spent in keen debate; and at last, when several of Mr. Erskine's friends, overcome with fatigue, had withdrawn,‡ the Synod, by a majority of not more than six voices, decided that he was censurable for some indecorous expressions in his sermon, “tending to disquiet the peace of the Church, and impugning several acts of Assembly and proceedings of church judicatories.”

Against this deed Mr. Alexander Moncreiff of Abernethy immediately entered a dissent and protest, which was adhered to by twelve ministers, including Mr. Meik the Moderator, and Mr. William Wilson, of Perth; with two ruling elders. Mr. James Fisher of Kinclaven, whom the Synod pronounced incompetent to vote, because he was Mr. Erskine's son-in-law, protested also against the sentence, and appealed to the next General Assembly. Mr. Erskine himself, too, protested

* He is sometimes called Minister of *Killin*. Possibly he was translated from the one place to the other.

† See Memoirs of the Rev. W. Wilson, p. 196. Messrs. Mercer and Mackie are numbered among the “warm Managers against Mr. Erskine,” True State, &c. p. 70.

‡ The True State of the Process, p. 80.

and appealed, promising to give the reasons of his appeal in due time ; and, after protesting that meanwhile all further procedure against him be stopped, he retired. Yet the Synod proceeded in the cause, and, after reasoning, agreed to rebuke Mr. Erskine at their bar, and “ admonish him to behave orderly for the future.” They at the same time appointed “ the Presbytery of Stirling to inquire anent his after behaviour at their privy censures, and report to the next Synod.”*

At the next meeting of Synod, which took place at Stirling, 10th April 1733, the accused minister could not be persuaded to express regret for his public remonstrance against the unwarrantable acts of the Assembly ; nor had the zeal of his accusers abated. A Representation and Petition, subscribed by fifteen Elders of the Kirk Session of Stirling, was laid before the Court, humbly beseeching them to reverse the sentence passed against their Minister. They complain that their beloved pastor was found censurable for certain expressions, while the sentence does not condescend on the expressions that gave offence ; and they submit to the judgment of the Synod, whether “ such an indistinct and general sentence is agreeable to the wisdom, or for the honour and credit, of such a Court as the Provincial Synod of Perth and Stirling.” They request the attention of the Synod also to the dangerous consequences likely to result from the execution of the sentence. “ Though the condemnatory sentence passed against our Minister,” say they, “ cannot lessen his character among us, nor diminish from the just esteem that we and many others through the land have for him ; yet what wide breaches such proceedings may

* The True State of the Process, p. 28.

occasion, we leave it to the more deliberate judgment of this Reverend Court." This seasonable Petition, however, was not transmitted by the Committee of Bills ; and the Synod, after reasoning, refused to hear it. An attempt made by the Presbytery of Stirling to accommodate matters by a conference with a Committee of Synod, proved equally unavailing. " Mr. Erskine being called and compearing, and the Synod going to execute their sentence in the terms of their appointment, he told that he adhered to his appeal." Having with difficulty obtained permission to speak, he read the following paper :

" According to the utterance given by the Lord to me at Perth, I delivered his mind, particularly with relation to some prevailing evils of the day, which to me are matter of confession, and therefore I dare not retract the least part of that testimony. I am heartily sorry that ever the Reverend Synod should have commenced a process against me, for what I am persuaded was nothing else but truth ; especially when they have never yet made it appear that I have in the least receded from the word of God, and our approved standards of doctrine, worship, discipline, or government. Every man hath his own proper gift of utterance ; and, according to the gift bestowed on me, so I expressed myself at Perth ; and, if I had given offence by any expressions uttered by me at that time, I should very willingly retract, and beg pardon. But I hope my Reverend Brethren will excuse me to say, that I am not yet convinced of any just ground given for a Rebuke and Admonition."*

* The True State, &c. pp 59, 60.

The next meeting of the General Assembly was anticipated with uncommon anxiety. Having met on the 3d May, the Rev. John Gowdie, Moderator, the Court, apparently with a view to strike terror into Mr. Erskine and his supporters, began with the discussion of a cause respecting a notorious intrusion at Kinross, and pronounced a rigorous sentence against the Presbytery of Dunfermline for their refusal to receive and enrol Mr. Robert Stark as a Member of Presbytery. Mr. Erskine, however, sustained by conscious rectitude, and trusting in aid from above, maintained the cause in which he had embarked with unwavering decision and fearless intrepidity. The Reasons of his Appeal, which were produced and read, are thus eulogized in a late publication: "Whether we consider their pointed bearing on the subject, the piety that runs through them, or the noble spirit of independent feeling which they breathe, they are alike admirable."* The Assembly, after hearing parties, by a majority of votes, "found the expressions vented by Mr. Erskine, and contained in the minutes of the Synod's proceedings, with the answers thereto made by him, to be offensive, and to tend to disturb the peace and good order of the Church; and therefore approve of the proceedings of the Synod, and appoint him to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar, in order to terminate the process." But Mr. Erskine, while he received the rebuke and admonition, judged it his necessary duty to lodge the following protest:†

"Although I have a very great and dutiful regard to the Judicatories of this Church, to whom I own my

* Struth. Hist. of Scotland. † The True State, &c. p. 67.

subjection in the Lord ; yet in respect the Assembly have found me censurable, and have tendered a Rebuke and Admonition to me, for things I conceive agreeable unto and founded upon the word of God and our approved standards ; I find myself obliged to protest against the foresaid censure, as importing that I have, in my doctrine at the opening of the Synod of Perth, October last, departed from the word of God and the foresaid standards ; and that I shall be at liberty to preach the same truths of God, and to testify against the same or like defections of this Church upon all proper occasions. And I do hereby adhere unto the testimonies I have formerly emitted against the Act of Assembly 1732, whether in the protest entered against it in open Assembly, or yet in my Synodical Sermon ; craving this my protest and declaration to be inserted in the Records of Assembly, and that I be allowed extracts thereof.

EBENEZER ERSKINE."

May 14, 1733.

The Rev. Messrs. Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher concurred with Mr. Erskine in this measure, and subjoined a written adherence. No one of the four, however, appears, at this stage of the business, to have entertained any thought of a formal separation from the Church of Scotland ; and the ruling clergy would have consulted their own credit by tolerating or overlooking the protest. But they were not disposed to exercise such forbearance ; and here, as in many other instances, the wisdom of Providence is admirably displayed in overruling trivial and fortuitous incidents for the accomplishment of important events. The protest hap-

pened to drop from the table, and had almost escaped notice, while the Court was proceeding to a different business. A member, however, having picked up the paper and perceived its tenor, immediately addressed the Moderator, and, with a stentorian voice, solicited the attention of the house to an insufferable insult done to its authority. The protest being read, strong feelings of indignation were excited; and orders given, that the four brethren, who had quietly retired, should be cited to appear early on the following day. When they did accordingly appear, a committee was appointed for the purpose of persuading them to withdraw their protest; and that committee having merely reported that their efforts had proved ineffectual, without stating the reasons which the brethren assigned for their refusal, the Assembly, by a great majority, passed sentence to the following effect:

That the four brethren should appear before the Commission, in August next, to express sorrow for their conduct, and retract their protest; that in the event of their refusal to submit, the Commission is appointed to suspend them from the exercise of their ministry; that if they shall then act contrary to the sentence of suspension, the Commission, at their meeting in November, or any subsequent meeting, must proceed to a higher censure.

On the 8th of August, when the Commission met, two sensible and manly representations were laid before them; the one by Messrs. Erskine and Fisher, and the other by Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff.* The

* These Representations were published at the time. The substance of them may be seen in the Narrative of the Secession, included in the Re-exhibition, pp. 296-298.

former, after a tedious discussion of the point, was allowed to be read; the same indulgence was positively denied to the latter. In these papers the brethren supported their protestation by a series of powerful arguments, while they candidly stated, that were they to profess sorrow for the struggle they had made in opposition to measures by which the spiritual liberties of the Church of Christ were violated, they would be guilty of gross dissimulation. Representations and petitions, soliciting a delay of the execution of the Assembly's sentence against them, were presented by the Kirk-session of Stirling, and by the Magistrates and Town-council of that burgh, and also by the Presbyteries of Stirling, Dunblane, and Ellon. But all these representations were without effect. The Commission, after a committee of their number had made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the brethren to acquiesce in the decision of the Assembly, immediately pronounced sentence against them, and "did suspend the Four protesting Brethren from the exercise of the ministerial function, and all the parts thereof."

The sentence being intimated, they protested for themselves, and as many as adhered to them, that this sentence is null and void, and that it shall be lawful for them to exercise their ministry, as they had previously done; and that if, in consequence of the sentence, any minister or probationer shall exercise any part of their pastoral work, the same shall be held as a violent intrusion on their labours. Protests were at the same time taken by the ruling elders of the four congregations immediately concerned, testifying their continued adherence to their ministers, notwithstanding the sentence of suspension inflicted upon them.

Mr. Erskine and his associates accordingly persisted in the regular exercise of their office ; yet, without hesitation they obeyed the summons they received to attend another meeting of the Commission in November. Renewed endeavours were then used to induce them to retract their protestation ; but all such efforts proved utterly abortive. A considerable number of Synods and Presbyteries sent up communications in different forms, earnestly recommending forbearance, lenity, and tenderness, towards the suspended ministers. Many members of the Commission itself spoke warmly for delay. But, when the question was put, Proceed immediately to inflict a higher censure, or delay the same till March, it carried, by the casting vote of Mr. John Goldie the Moderator, to proceed immediately to inflict a higher censure. At this crisis, the Commission proposed certain terms of accommodation, which, though regarded by not a few of its members as an instance of great condescension, the Brethren, after mature deliberation, could not conscientiously accept. The Commission, therefore, on the 16th of November, passed sentence on them, loosing their relation to their respective charges ; declaring their churches vacant ; and prohibiting all ministers of the Church of Scotland to employ them in any ministerial function.

No sooner was the decision announced than a Protestation was given in by the venerable Mr. Gabriel Wilson, of Maxton, and adhered to by other six ministers,* declaring that it shall be lawful for them to com-

* These were Messrs. Ralph Erskine and James Wardlaw, Dunfermline ; Thomas Mair, Orwell ; John Maclaren, Edinburgh ; John Currie, Kinglassie ; Thomas Nairn, Abbotshall.

plain of this sentence to any subsequent assembly ; to testify in a becoming manner, on all occasions, against the defections of the Church ; and to hold ministerial communion with their " dear Brethren," as if no such sentence had been passed against them.

The four Brethren themselves too, when the sentence was intimated to them, read a Protestation, declaring that, notwithstanding this sentence, their pastoral relation to their congregations shall be held firm and valid, and that they still hold communion with all who adhere to the principles of the true Church of Scotland ; stating that, from the course of defection carried on by the prevailing party in the Established Church, they are obliged to make a secession from that party, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them ; and protesting that it shall be lawful and warrantable for them to exercise the keys of doctrine, discipline, and government, according to the word of God, and the principles and constitution of the Church of Scotland.

In the new and interesting circumstances in which they found themselves placed, it was their earnest wish to unite prudence with firmness, and to be entirely under the Divine guidance. A few weeks after their expulsion from the communion of the Established Church, they met, according to previous concert, at the Bridge of Gairney, a small village about three miles south from Kinross. The first day of their meeting, being the 5th of December, was wholly occupied in prayer, humiliation, and pious conference. The day following, they renewed the same exercises, and then proceeded to a careful consideration of the question, Whether it was expedient for them, in their present situation, to assume

a judicative capacity; and “after much and serious reasoning on both sides of the question,” as it is related by one of their number, “the four Brethren did all, with one voice, give it as their judgment, that they should presently constitute into a Presbytery; and the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine was, by their unanimous consent, desired to be their mouth to the Lord in this solemn action; and he was enabled, with much enlargement of soul, to consecrate and dedicate them to the Lord, and to the service of his Church, particularly of his broken and oppressed heritage in the present situation into which, by the holy and wise providence of God, they were brought; and, after prayer, he was chosen Moderator of their Presbytery.” “I hope,” adds the venerable writer, “they felt and experienced something of the Lord’s gracious countenance and special presence. Two Reverend Brethren, Messrs. Ralph Erskine and Thomas Mair, were witnesses to all that passed the two days mentioned; they were not then in conjunction with the four ministers in secession from the judicatories, but the Lord afterwards cleared their way to join them.”*

While, for various weighty reasons, they thus assumed a Presbyterian capacity, they gave another evidence of that grave, deliberate, and cautious spirit, which corresponded with their years and experience, and with the solemn impressions they cherished, of the responsibility attached to their conduct, in the extraordinary circumstances in which they stood. They unanimously resolved to defer proceeding to acts of jurisdiction, till they should see whether the courts of the

* Wilson’s Continuation of the Defence of Reformation Principles, &c. pp. 152, 153.

national Church would return to their duty. Their meetings were held chiefly for asking counsel of God, and for mutual advice and encouragement. They deemed it necessary, however, in the month of May following, to emit a Testimony to the principles of the Church of Scotland, in which they illustrate the reasons of their Protestation before the Commission in November, and the grounds of their secession from the established judicatories. This is what is termed the First or the Extrajudicial Testimony.

The boldness, and decision, blended with caution, which thus marked the procedure of the four ejected Brethren, at once surprised their friends, and confounded their enemies. A general impression was felt, that they had been treated with unwarrantable severity, and that the interests of the church required the prevailing party to make some concessions, with a view to their return. The Assembly that met in May 1734, discovered a conciliatory spirit. Besides rescinding those recent deeds which had been the immediate subject of complaint,* they passed an act, authorising the Synod of Perth and Stirling, without pronouncing any judgment on the legality or formality of the former proceedings of the church judicatories in relation to this affair, to restore the four Brethren to communion, and to their respective charges. That Synod accordingly, at their meeting on the 2d July, “did take off the sentence pronounced by the Commission of the General Assembly 1733, against the foresaid four Brethren,” and reinstate

* We refer to the act 1730 forbidding church courts to record dissents and protests, and the act 1732 respecting the settlement of vacant parishes; both of which the Assembly now declared to be *no longer binding rules* in this church.

them in their office, as ministers of their several parishes. The Brethren were fully expected to express high satisfaction with those appearances of reformation which had been exhibited, and to avail themselves immediately of the opportunity given them to return to the church. Yet, after solemn and repeated deliberation, they concurred in the opinion, that whatever cause of joy was supplied by some of the proceedings of the Assembly 1734, it was their duty to remain in a state of secession, till they should have the satisfaction to see more unequivocal and decided evidence, that the course of defection against which they had protested was really abandoned. To show to all concerned the grounds of this conviction, they published, some time before the meeting of Assembly 1735, a small pamphlet, containing the "Reasons why they have not acceded to the judicatories of the Established Church." Their apprehension that the temperate measures adopted by the Assembly 1734, would have no lasting effect, and were permitted, by the ruling party, on the principles of a worldly and calculating policy, appeared to the four Brethren to be mournfully justified by various proceedings of the two Assemblies immediately following. After the close of the Assembly 1736, by which some violent intrusions were confirmed, and a Professor convicted of dangerous errors, was dismissed with a gentle caution, they considered it "full time to proceed to the exercise of the powers with which they were entrusted by the Head of the church, for the vindication of his truths and ordinances, and for the relief of the Christian people, by supplying them with sermon."* At their

* Test. of the Unit. Assoc. Syn. p. 52.

meeting at Perth on the 3d December that year, they enacted their Second, or Judicial Testimony, which was soon after published.

This enactment, which was their first judicial deed, and the corresponding measures to which they now resorted, were succeeded by a complete separation betwixt them and the Established Church. On the 17th May 1738, in consequence of representations from the Synod of Perth and Stirling, and the Synod of Fife, complaining of disorderly practices pursued by the Seceding Ministers, the Assembly appointed its Commission, if they should see cause, to prepare and execute a libel against them. The Commission, accordingly, at their meeting in November, did appoint that a libel be executed against all the eight ministers now composing the Associate Presbytery; Messrs. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, Thomas Mair of Orwell, Thomas Nairn of Abbotshall, and James Thomson of Burntisland having acceded to that Presbytery. The libel consisted of ten articles, representing the various instances of conduct in which they followed out their secession as high crimes, and cited them to appear before the General Assembly at its meeting in May 1739, to answer for their misdeeds. The Assembly of that year, after deliberating two days on the subject, resolved to proceed on the libel transmitted from the Commission of the preceding Assembly. Against this decision the pious Mr. Willison of Dundee, with other four ministers, and two elders, entered their dissent. The libelled ministers, meanwhile, had taken their ground. They met in Edinburgh, while the Assembly were sitting, and passed an act, entitled the DECLINATURE, in which, for the reasons they specify, they declined all

authority, power, and jurisdiction which the Judicatories of the National Church might claim over the Associate Presbytery, or any of its members, or any who chose to place themselves under its inspection. On the 18th of the month, being called to make their appearance before the Court, they did appear. The Moderator began by assuring them that, “notwithstanding all that had passed, the Assembly was willing to drop the libel, and receive them with open arms, if they would return into the bosom of the Church.” The Rev. Mr. Mair, the Moderator of the Presbytery, replied, that they had come as a constituted Presbytery, and that he, however insufficient and unworthy, was appointed, as their mouth, to deliver their mind, by reading an act agreed on by the Presbytery. In consequence of this reply, the Assembly caused the libel to be read, after which Mr. Mair read the Declinature, mentioned above, from beginning to end, and then delivered it to the Moderator of the Assembly. The Presbytery then withdrew to their place of meeting; “and, having seriously considered the direction and assistance which they hope the Lord has been pleased to give them in their essay at this time of testifying in the above manner, the meeting of Presbytery was concluded with thanksgiving and prayer.”* The Assembly now declared the eight seceding brethren worthy of deposition; but, from motives of expediency, deferred the passing of the sentence, and satisfied themselves with earnestly recommending it to the next Assembly to proceed against them, unless “they returned to their duty and submission.” This recommendation

* Re-exhibition, p. 222.

was not neglected. On the 12th of May 1740, the Assembly, on the motion of the Rev. James Banatyne, the Moderator of the last Assembly, proceeded to consider the libel ; and, finding it relevant and *proven* in its most material articles, they did “ actually depose them from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging them, and every one of them, to exercise the same, or any part thereof, within this Church, in all time coming.” Their parishes were declared vacant ; and the Moderator was appointed to write letters to the civil authorities, in the several places of their residence, that they might be dispossessed of their churches. This decisive sentence was passed by a great majority ; but fifteen ministers and four elders dissented from it.

The deposed brethren were neither overawed nor disconcerted. Unmoved by a sentence which they deemed utterly unjust and invalid, and regarding themselves as persecuted for righteousness’ sake, they continued to exercise their office, while life and health were granted. Their efforts and sufferings in the cause of truth and religious liberty highly endeared them to a great proportion of the Christian public ; and the Lord of the harvest was pleased to smile on their labours, and to crown them with extensive success.

The succinct and dispassionate narrative now given of facts and circumstances attending the commencement of the Secession, will meet the approbation, we trust, of well-informed and impartial judges. We do not intend to examine generally the merits of the Seceders, or fully to advocate their cause. This work, however, would be materially defective, were it to con-

tain no observations relative to the developement of Mr. Erskine's character, as it is affected by his attitude and behaviour as the standard-bearer in the Secession.

Very probably, the same diversity of sentiment on this subject, which appeared in his own age, still in some degree exists. But we are inclined to think, that among Christians of nearly all denominations, his posthumous fame has been progressively increasing, and that his name will descend to a distant posterity as occupying a distinguished place among the advocates of Christian truth and liberty. That he equals or approaches a Luther, a Calvin, or a Knox, we do not allege. Yet if "he attained not to the first three," without question he holds an honourable place among "the thirty."

That no unadvised expression ever fell from his lips—that the honest indignation he felt at measures which he strongly disapproved of, never for a moment exceeded the limits that strict propriety prescribes—or that he and his valuable coadjutors conducted every step of their procedure, in the great cause they had espoused, in the very best manner, and did every thing in the fittest season, it were rash to affirm. Yet the general and almost unalloyed excellence of their management, in the first stage of their progress, can scarcely admit of a doubt.

The high estimation in which EBENEZER ERSKINE was held as a Christian, a minister, and a member of society, among persons of every class who had the best opportunities of knowing him when he commenced his career as a leader in the Secession, will clearly appear from the following extracts from the representations in his behalf, transmitted from Stirling to the Commission of Assembly, at their meeting, in August 1733.

The PRESBYTERY of Stirling state, “that we being enjoined by the last General Assembly to report to this diet of the Reverend Commission the conduct and behaviour of our Reverend Brother, Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, with respect to the act of Assembly in his affair; do represent, that in our inquiries this day in this matter, a very favourable report was made to us concerning him.” “Mr. Erskine’s character,” they add, “is so established among the body of professors in this part of the Church, that we believe *even the authority of an Assembly condemning him cannot lessen it; yea, the condemnation itself, in the present case, will tend to heighten it.*” The Presbytery represent, in very strong terms, both the injustice and inexpediency of proceeding to suspend him for the protest he had taken against the deed of Assembly, which they consider as meaning no more than “a solemn testimony and declaration of his own mind for the vindication of himself, and which he thought might tend to the preservation of the rights and privileges of this Church in cases of defection.”

“We beg leave to observe,” say the KIRK-SESSION of Stirling, “that having had a trial of Mr. Erskine’s ministerial gifts and labours these two years bygone, we cannot but own that, according to our discerning and experience, his Lord and Master hath endowed him with a very edifying gift of teaching and preaching, and many other good qualifications every way fitted for the office of the ministry, and particularly in this city and congregation; which, together with the great pains he has taken in the other parts of his ministerial labours, and, we hope, not without success; and all attended with a very tender walk, wise and prudent behaviour, have made him most acceptable to us, and

persons of all distinctions in this place, and particularly God's serious remnant in it." "We are verily persuaded, that if the Reverend Commission shall, notwithstanding, execute the Assembly's orders at this time, and lay Mr. Ebenezer Erskine under the sentence of suspension, and that for no other reason but the protest given in by him to the last Assembly, which he himself acknowledgeth to be in its own nature, and in the signification of the word, nothing else but a solemn testimony for, and declaration of the truth, when men conceive it to be injured; and such a declaration as he judged might be given without any contempt of church authority; we say that if such a sentence should be passed against such a minister, for such a reason, we fear it will have too great an influence upon our people, to alienate their minds and hearts from that respect and affection, which otherwise they owe to ministers, church judicatories, and their Commissions."

THE MAGISTRATES AND TOWN COUNCIL of the burgh of Stirling, in fine, for themselves "and in name of the whole community thereof," with equal earnestness, entreated the Commission to forbear pronouncing a sentence against their minister, which could not fail to be "very moving and afflicting" to them. Among other statements they say, "We beg leave briefly to represent that Mr. Erskine was settled as an additional minister among us, for the greater edification of the place, and that with no small trouble and expense; that we have always lived in good friendship with him, after now two full years acquaintance; that we find him to be a *man of a peaceable disposition of mind*, and of a religious walk and conversation, and to be every way fitted and qualified for discharging the office of the mi-

nistry among us; and that he has, accordingly, discharged the same to our great satisfaction.”*

These ample attestations from the Presbytery, the Session, and the Magistrates of Stirling, possess very great weight, and entitle the individual whom they concern to candid consideration, with reference to any particular cause which he had resolved to support.

His sterling *integrity* in espousing and maintaining that cause which led him eventually to secede from the national church, is above suspicion. His whole conduct gave evidence that he was animated by conscientious respect to the principles of Scripture; and, by an ardent desire to promote the true welfare of the church, and to prevent what he deemed incalculably ruinous to the best interests of men. The pernicious tendency of the act of Assembly 1732, respecting the settlement of vacant parishes made a deep impression on his mind, and this impression was greatly strengthened by the parallel procedure which speedily ensued. “I am firmly persuaded,” says he, near the close of his Reasons of Appeal, “if a timely remedy be not provided, *this act* will very soon terminate in the utter ruin of a faithful ministry in the Church of Scotland.”† According to his fixed and deliberate judgment, *truth had fallen in the street*; and the injuries which the course of administration pursued for years by the General Assembly had done to the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as

* These quotations are taken *verbatim* from the Appendix to a Pamphlet published 1733, entitled “Representations of Messrs. E. E. and J. F., W. W. and A. M.” pp. 65, 66, 70, 71, 73, 74.

† True State of the Process, p. 45.

well as to the interest of religious liberty, rendered it the imperative duty of the friends of Christ to adopt the most vigorous and decisive measures.*

His unquestionable integrity was graced by the *fortitude and dignity* with which he maintained his cause. His magnanimity was the effect, not merely of natural temperament, but of humble confidence in the God whom he served, and in the faithful promises of Scripture respecting the ultimate prosperity of Zion, and of them that seek her good. Accordingly, at the conclusion of the Representation addressed by him and Mr. Fisher to the Commission of Assembly that met in August 1733, he has the following expressions: "But if, after all, the Commission shall think fit to execute the above unjust sentence against us, then adhering to this our representation and protestation, we commit our cause to Him that judgeth righteously, and who executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. We firmly believe that, whatever measures

* Similar views are thus expressed by his friend Mr. Wilson, of Perth. "As to the present state and condition," says that excellent man in his Diary, 10th Nov. 1731, "of the Church of Scotland, matters look with a very dismal and threatening aspect; ministers are thrust in upon vacant parishes contrary to the wishes of elders and people in all corners of the land. Disaffected heritors interest themselves everywhere in the settlement of parishes, and they introduce such ministers as elders and people are averse to. Our congregations are thus planted with a set of corrupt ministers, who are strangers to the power of godliness; and, therefore, neither in their doctrine nor walk is there any savour of Christ among them. Yea, such are becoming the prevailing party among the ministry, and too many of these are mockers at the exercises and real experiences of the godly," &c. Ferrier's Mem. of the Rev. W. Wilson, pp. 163, 169.

are now taken, the Lord will arise and have mercy upon Zion ; and when the time to favour her is come, he will appear in his glory, and regard the prayer of the destitute ; upon which account the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord."

Though those who well knew him could, as we have just seen, eulogise him as " a man of a peaceable disposition," he was not found pusillanimous or irresolute in the matters of God. The same Christian courage with which he testified against existing defections in his sermons at the opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, characterized his behaviour after he was arraigned as a pannel at their bar. His answers to the remarks of his accusers discover undaunted resolution.—" As to the last remark," he says, for example, " concerning the act of Assembly lodging the power of election in heritors and elders, I cannot, and dare not retract my testimony against it, either before the Assembly, the day after it was passed into an act, or by what I said in my sermon before this Reverend Synod ; in regard I cannot see the authority of the King of Zion giving warrant to confer the power of voting in the election of ministers upon heritors beyond other Christians ; especially when in the said act, heritors disaffected both to church and state are put upon a level with those of our communion."*—In the concluding sentence of his Preface to that noted sermon as it proceeded from the press, he expresses in the following terms, that dignified composure with which he anticipated the result of the prosecution : " If any of the author's friends and well-wishers be afraid of further trouble to him upon account

* True State, &c. pp. 23, 24.

of this sermon; let them know that, through grace, he chooses rather to suffer with the oppressed members of Christ, than to enjoy all the ease and pleasure of those who oppress them in their spiritual liberties; which, being the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, will be reckoned for before the scene be ended."*—Even when he appeared in the presence of the General Assembly and its Commission, his respect for ecclesiastical authority was accompanied with dignity of demeanour and intrepidity of soul. His antagonists perhaps expected to overpower him by their superior numbers, angry countenances, and menacing words, in particular, by the terrors of suspension and excommunication. But all their assaults were impotent, like the dashing of the raging waves on the immovable rock. Relying on his Almighty Guardian, he calmly persisted in the discharge of his duty. On his way home, we are informed, immediately after the Commission had suspended him, he assisted the Rev. Mr. Kidd, of Queensferry, in the administration of the Lord's Supper; and, on the Sabbath morning, at the commencement of public worship, he gave out part of the 51st Psalm to be sung, including these lines, on which he threw out some affecting observations:

My closed lips, O Lord, by thee
Let them be opened;
Then shall thy praises by my mouth
Abroad be published.

This man of God, in a word, showed no small portion of the Christian heroism displayed by Scotch Re-

* Works of E. E. vol. i. pp. 453-4.

formers in preceding ages. It was imputed, indeed, to him and his coadjutors as a crime, that they had “unparalleled boldness.”*

To unshrinking firmness and resolution he added consummate *ability and judgment* in his manner of conducting his cause. In that intelligence and quick apprehension which were indispensable, when struggling with chafed and acute adversaries, prepared to avail themselves of every advantage, and to bring ill-founded or aggravated charges against him,—he was not deficient. A few instances of the talent he discovered may be culled from authentic documents relating to the process.

His answers to the remarks which the Committee of Synod made on his sermon, are at once judicious and temperate. He destroys the force of their first remark by a single sentence—an ingenuous expression of humility and modesty. “The first charge is, ‘that the strain of a great part of the sermon appears to compare the ministers of this Church with the most corrupt teachers under the Old Testament.’ This charge is not, nor cannot be proven by any passage in my discourse; for I know there is a great body of faithful ministers in the Church of Scotland, with whom I do not reckon myself worthy to be compared.”† Another remark was, that he charged his forefathers with a sinful silence or negligence, because he said he did not recollect any particular act of Assembly, since the Revolution, asserting the supreme headship of Christ in the Church, in opposition to the encroachments made

* Act of Assembly, 1739. Re-exhibition, p. 224.

† True State, p. 20.

upon it in the late times of persecution and tyranny. "I answer," he replies, "although I have a very great regard to the instruments of our deliverance at the Revolution, particularly the godly ministers who survived the flood of persecuting tyranny, and *my own Father* among the rest; yet I hope the Reverend Synod will excuse me, though I do not look upon those worthy ministers, or these that have succeeded them, to this day, as infallible; but, if the Reverend Synod can show me where the headship and sovereignty of Christ has been asserted by any particular act of Assembly, since the Revolution, in opposition to those encroachments, I shall very willingly own my mistake; but, if not, I humbly move that the Reverend Synod may address the ensuing Assembly for supplying that defect."*

His honest dexterity appeared also in the successful check which, during the discussion in the Synod, he gave to Mr. Adam Ferguson of Killin, whose zeal had transported him beyond the bounds of discretion. Having been accused by that member of deviating "from the standards of this Church," he requested that his accuser be obliged by the Synod to make good his charge, and thereupon took instruments. Mr. Ferguson found himself in consequence under the necessity of explaining his statement and retracting his charge.†

When Mr. Erskine stood at the bar of the Assembly, he acquitted himself in a manner equally worthy of his talents. In his "Reasons of Appeal" he urges the plea of necessity for the faithful testimony he had delivered in the sermon so loudly decried. "Being, quite con-

* True State, p. 23.

† Ibid. pp. 26, 29, 30.

trary to his inclination, put into the chair, at Stirling, and therefore obliged to preach before the Synod at Perth, he found himself under a necessity, by virtue of his commission from God, and in an agreeableness to the commendable acts and constitutions of this Church in former times, to be free and faithful in declaring what he looked upon as a departure from the *corner-stone*.* He complains, and apparently not without reason, of the prejudice and bitterness of spirit manifested by the prevailing party in the Synod, as disabling them for “judging impartially in his cause.” “They knew very well,” he says, “I was a stranger lately come within their bounds; which, according to the rules both of natural and revealed religion, bound them to humanity and civility [towards me,] especially when standing, on the matter, as a pannel at their bar, willing to submit to any censure clearly founded on the word of God, or the rules of this Church. But such hard names and speeches were passed, in the course of reasoning, as plainly discovered a bias and ferment; and that not against me only, but against the grave and honourable audience before whom I had preached. But I forbear to be more particular, unless I be obliged to it before the bar of the Assembly.”† With regard to the Synod’s omitting to specify any one article of faith or rule of practice he had violated, and the vague charge of disregarding the law of charity, which some members had advanced, he makes the following concise and pointed remarks:—“I submit it to the Venerable Assembly to judge if it is just and equal dealing to condemn any man for a multitude of expressions *in*

* True State, p. 36.

† Ibid. pp. 37, 38.

cumulo, without showing the particular rules which he has transgressed. 'Tis true, it was cast up in the course of reasoning, that the appellant had transgressed the law of love and charity, by taking notice of some of the particular evils of the day; but this is a very unjust *allegdgence* [allegation,] if it be considered that a minister of Christ discovers the greatest love to his own soul, and to the generation, when he gives faithful warning from God, that people may not rush upon *God's neck, and the thick bosses of his buckler*."* His reasoning in support of his remonstrance against the act of Assembly, 1732, is also full of energy. The following extract may suffice for a specimen :

"It is alleged 'that, by subscribing the Formula, I am engaged not to preach against any act of Assembly.' But this can have no manner of weight, in regard it cannot be supposed that any thinking man ever engaged to be subject to *all* acts of Assembly that might take place after his subscription, unless they were agreeable unto, and founded upon the word of God: For this were to take it for granted that the *church is infallible*, and were a binding the conscience of men to an *implicit obedience*; which, I am very sure, was never the intendment of our engagements by the Formula. Our subjection to Presbyteries is only *in the Lord*; from which no argument can be adduced for a sinful silence, as to acts and constitutions, which seem to us to be against Christ's interest and authority over his church."†

His extemporaneous reasoning before the Assembly was also creditable to his caution and ability. He

* True State, p. 40.

† Ibid. pp. 43, 44.

clearly proved that the Synod had violated an express rule in the Form of process, by instituting a prosecution against him for censure, without ever showing wherein he had departed from the word of God and the standards of the church.—When Mr. Mercer introduced an impertinent story of disturbances which had occurred at the settlement in the parish of *Kinfauns*, he justly complained of the speech “as designed to lodge the blame of the disorders at Kinfauns on his sermon, which yet was not preached for several months after these disorders had happened.”*—It was moved by a reverend member of Assembly, that Mr. Erskine might be asked if he owned what the advocate had spoken at the bar as his own sentiments in his affair, and if he would give any sense or explication of the propositions charged against him by the Synod. Those questions being, accordingly, proposed to him by the Moderator, instantly aware of their object, and determined not to become his own accuser, he, with great propriety, replied, “that as he would not adopt every thing spoken by the lawyer at the bar, so neither would he put any sense upon the propositions as stated by the Synod in their charge, in regard they were their own, and none of his.”†

* The settlement here referred to, is thus described in Mr. Wilson's Diary: “In the month of March Mr. Charles F—— was ordained in Kinfauns upon a call signed by seven heritors and life-renters. One of them, viz. Mr. C——, of Glendoig, was an elder, and the only gentleman of our communion who signed the call. All the rest of the elders, being six, together with the whole congregation, were reclaiming against the settlement.” Ferrier's Memoirs of Rev. W. Wilson, p. 181.

† True State, pp. 4, 6.

In his appearances before the Commission he manifested similar firmness and discretion. At the meeting in August, being interrogated "Whether he was sorry for protesting against the authority of the last Assembly, and if he now retracted his protest?" He answered, "He was indeed sorry that what he had done should be interpreted by any a contempt of the authority of the judicatories of this church, no such thing being intended by his protest, but only a solemn adherence unto the truths of God delivered in his Synodical sermon, for the emitting of which he had been rebuked and admonished solemnly at the Assembly's bar, as though he had vented some notorious error or heresy." With respect to the other part of the question,—Whether or not he retracted his protestation, he referred them to the written answers which he and his protesting Brethren had drawn up. The Moderator then informed him that the Commission had resolved to read none of their papers, but that they must answer *viva voce* to the above questions. Mr. Erskine, however, maintained that it was the privilege of a person sisted before any court to make his defence either by word or writ, as he thought proper, and again urged the acceptance of his written answers. After two hours were spent to no purpose "in pumping Mr. Erskine for an answer *viva voce*," he was removed; and after some debate, it was carried by a vote that his representation should be read; which was accordingly done, though contrary to the first resolution they had passed. The Representation itself, subscribed by Messrs. Erskine and Fisher, as was formerly said, is a masterly production. It states with great perspicuity and force a series of principles respecting the sovereign authority of Christ, the only

King and Head of the Church—the spiritual nature of his kingdom—the subserviency of his laws and ordinances to the edification and welfare of his subjects—the sufficiency and immutability of that system of laws which he has given—the limited and ministerial nature of all church power—the fallibility of church judicatories—the right of private judgment—and the duty of lamenting and of protesting against those perversions of church authority which are injurious to the cause of truth, and to the liberties of Christ's kingdom. The Representers then point out their particular objections against the Act of Assembly 1732, and the reasons for which they could not conscientiously retract their protest. They happily avail themselves, in fine, of former precedents, particularly that of the Protesters against the Public Resolutions in the year 1651. The following paragraph, on the right of private judgment, may suffice for a sample of the tone and sentiment of this valuable paper :

“ It is the indispensable duty of every church member to examine, by the judgment of discretion, every thing imposed or enjoined by church authority, whether it agree with the unerring rule of the word. We are to ‘ prove all things,’ and ‘ hold fast that which is good.’ We must ‘ not believe every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world,’ 1 Thess. v. 21 ; 1 John iv. 1. Hence the Bereans are commended as ‘ noble’ and excellent persons for trying the doctrines of the Apostles themselves, whether they did agree with that part of the canon of the Scriptures then extant. And if after a diligent and impartial search, the acts and constitutions of judicatories be found repug-

nant to the word of God, we must not bring our consciences in bondage thereunto, but ‘stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.’ Neither doth this encourage men to transgress the line of subordination appointed in the word, but only constitutes them judges of their own actions, which they are obliged to conform, not to the decrees of men, but to the rule of the word; according to the practice of the Apostles, who, when discharged by the Jewish council to speak any more in the name of Jesus, found themselves obliged boldly to answer, ‘Whether it be right to obey God or man, judge ye?’ This their practice exactly corresponding to that Old Testament rule, ‘To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,’ Is. viii. 20,—which beyond doubt is obligatory upon inferiors as well as superiors.” *

These instances, we think, afford satisfactory evidence of the capacity and judgment, as well as integrity and fortitude, that marked the conduct of Ebenezer Erskine, as the prime leader in that important cause, in behalf of which he ultimately became a seceder.

The intelligent reader will observe that a number of the above statements are calculated, in some degree, to obviate several objections to his deportment with reference to that cause, which were not only urged at the first, but have been frequently repeated in succeeding times. A few of those objections appear to demand a little further consideration.

* The Representations of Messrs. E. Erskine, J. Fisher. W. Wilson, and A. Moncrieff to the Commission, &c. pp. 8, 9.

He has been accused of *self-inconsistency* with regard to the right of Christians to call their own pastors. This was one of the accusations preferred against him by the clergymen who found fault with his Synod sermon in 1732 ; and it has been revived by some late authors.* They represent his condemnation of the act of Assembly 1732 as grounded on principles at variance with those on which the settlement of parishes had been conducted ever since the Revolution. Let it suffice at present to cite his own vindication of himself from the attack of his original accusers :

“ As to the *second remark*,” says he, “ when speaking of the characters of the workmen employed about the house of God, I adhere to my notes on that head, which I have not now time to transcribe, as the truths of God ; but deny they infer the charge of my looking upon all the ministers of this church as thieves and robbers ; for I know that a vast many of them have both God’s call and the church’s call. But as for the violent settlements that have taken place since the patronage act, I cannot think upon them as warranted by the word of God. As to the last part of this remark, that the call of a minister ought not to be by the heritors or any other set of men, and refused that any mi-

* See in particular Sir Henry Moncreiff’s Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Erskine, Append. p. 444, &c. The Rev. Baronet dwells at large on the measures adopted for obtaining a second minister to Dunfermline in 1718. His manner of stating that case will fall to be considered in a Memoir of Mr. *Ralph Erskine*. The inquiring reader is referred, meanwhile, to the Review of Moncreiff’s Life of Dr. Erskine in the Christ. Repos. vol. iv. pp. 551-560. On the general question he may consult Struthers’ Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. book vii. pp. 599-616.

nister had God's call, who had only a call from the heritors, by which he evidently excludes the whole ministers of the Church of Scotland, and himself among them, from having the call of God, the body of Christians never having been allowed to vote in the election of a minister. I answer, I own that the call of a minister ought not to be by heritors *as such*, in regard that no such titles or distinctions of men are known in the kingdom of Christ. The only heritors there, are they that are 'rich in faith, they being heirs of the kingdom;' these are they that are 'precious in the sight of God and honourable.' And I am of opinion that in dispensing the privileges of Christ's kingdom, we ought to put honour and value upon men, not upon the account of their worldly heritages, but as they are valuable in the sight of God, and as his image is to be found upon them. Upon the same remark I further add, That as the election of ministers ought not to be by heritors as such, (far less these not of our communion,) nor any other set of men, but by the church, and I think I have good reason to refuse that any minister hath God's call, who has only a call from the heritors, *renitente et contradicente ecclesia* ;* yet notwithstanding, I do not hereby exclude the whole ministers of the Church of Scotland, nor myself among them, from having the call of God: In regard that from the Revolution till the act of Patronage came to be in force, I know of no settlement, but where *the body of the Christian people concurred in the election of their minister* ; and in the practice of the church, till of late, they were allowed to vote. Yea, to my certain know-

* ' While the church opposes and reclaims.'

ledge, in the south of Scotland, Presbyteries and other Judicatories, with the Christian people, wrestled jointly for the settlement of congregations, in opposition to malignant and disaffected heritors ; but *tempora mutantur*.”*

His *remonstrating in the pulpit*, against those proceedings of church courts of which he disapproved, has formed the subject of another charge against Mr. Erskine. For this part of his conduct, as we have seen, he was severely censured by the ruling clergy of his own age ; and the same accusation has been renewed in more recent times. Candour and impartiality, however, require us to observe, that, in resorting to this mode of resisting error and oppression, and of defending truth and liberty, he and his seceding Brethren were by no means singular. The Rev. Messrs. Boston of Ettrick, Willison of Dundee, Currie of Kinglassie, Bisset of Aberdeen, Lindsay of Bothkennar, and several others who never took part in the secession, were accustomed to use the same liberties. It is but fair also to weigh the strong reasons assigned by himself for these public remonstrances. “ If any think,” says he, in his Preface to the Synod sermon, “ upon the reading of the following discourse, that there is too great freedom used with respect to the present steps of defection ; let them remember that there is now no other way left to bear testimony against such things, but by warning the world against them from press or pulpit ; representations and petitions from ministers or

* ‘ The times are changed.’ The True State, &c. pp. 21, 22, 23.

church members at the bar being utterly disregarded; and no access to enter any protest or dissent against these proceedings in the public records, for the exoneration of conscience, or the instruction of our posterity that such things did not pass in our day without a struggle and testimony against them.”* On this topic too, the following sentiments occur in his Reasons of Appeal: “A watchman must exonerate himself upon the peril of his soul. ’Tis true he ought not knowingly to sound a false alarm. But whether is it safer for the city to have a false alarm sounded upon an apprehended danger, or to have the mouth of the watchman stopped, that he cannot sound an alarm when the danger is real and the city fallen into the hands of the enemy?”†

Mr. Erskine, in common with all his coadjutors, has been taxed with *schism and culpable obstinacy* for not embracing the opportunity of returning to the bosom of the National Church, presented, as has been mentioned above, by the General Assembly 1734. The conciliatory measures then adopted were truly far more laudable in themselves, and much better adapted to serve a good purpose, than the intolerant acts of some preceding Assemblies which had proved so generally offensive, and the severities that had been employed for intimidation. It is not wonderful that the orthodox ministers of the establishment, who had displayed un-

* Works, vol. i. p. 453.

† The True State, &c. p. 39. Some excellent remarks are made on this subject by the late Rev. *John Patison* of Edinburgh, in his Preface to the first edition of *M'Ewen's Essays*, pp. 56-69. Note.

common activity and zeal in promoting the adoption of these pacific measures felt considerably disappointed and even chagrined, when, after all their efforts, the four Brethren declined an immediate return. These Brethren themselves were neither without the sensibility that feels and appreciates well-intended exertions of friends, nor void of the candour that recognises with pleasure the least appearances of reformation on the part of those that have erred. What course it was now incumbent on them to adopt, was the subject of their deliberate, frequent, and prayerful consideration. Influenced by convictions of duty, they finally resolved not to accede immediately to the Judicatories, but to remain at least a little longer in a state of secession, till they saw more ample evidence of a real change in the procedure pursued by the ecclesiastical courts. Subsequent events served, in their apprehension, to demonstrate the propriety of this resolution; and Mr. Wilson of Perth, that individual of their number who had shown the strongest inclination to accept immediately of the invitation to return, was ultimately convinced that the resolution not to accede at that time was judiciously formed.

It is not our intention to institute a full inquiry into the grounds of their refusal to accede; nor is this necessary. The reasons alleged by themselves are entitled to calm and dispassionate consideration.* A brief and forcible outline of these reasons has lately been given to the world in an authorized document.† We shall only direct the attention of the reader to some

* Re-exhibition, pp. 229-256.

† Testimony of the United Assoc. Syn. pp. 45-52.

extracts from a long letter addressed by Mr. Erskine, individually, to the Moderator of the Presbytery of Stirling, in reply to an invitation given him, by that Presbytery, some time after the sentences pronounced by the Commission, 1733, against the four Brethren, had been "taken off:"

" REVEREND SIR,

" The Reverend Presbytery, at their last meeting in this place, having done me the honour to choose me for their Moderator, and to send two of their members to invite me to take the chair, I returned such an answer as occurred at the time, with my thanks to the Reverend Brethren who had put that piece of respect upon me. But in regard I understand the chair is not yet filled with a new election, and that this perhaps might flow from some misunderstanding of my verbal answer to the two Brethren, I beg leave to declare myself a little more fully upon that head.

" The return I made, if I rightly remember, was, that matters were now come to that situation both with respect to the Established Church and the four Brethren, that, for my own part, until I saw some other steps taken towards reformation than any that had yet appeared to me, I could not accede to communion with the judicatories, and consequently could not accept of the Moderator's chair in the Presbytery of Stirling."

[After expressing his esteem for those worthy ministers of the Established Church with whom at that time he still maintained a brotherly communion and correspondence, he adverts to the ejection of the four Brethren, by the judicatories, to the circumstances of spiritual destitution to which many Christians, in various parts of the land, had been reduced, by means of

violent intrusions ; to the encouragement these Brethren had to afford them relief ; since, though they were but few, they made a competent number for a court, and since “ the promise of Christ’s gracious presence and countenance is not confined to a church enjoying the benefit of a legal establishment, but extended even to two or three met together in his name ; and to their having constituted themselves into a Presbytery, and solemnly dedicated themselves to the service of Christ and of his oppressed members. He then proceeds to show, in the following terms, that the charge of schism is “ altogether groundless :”]

“ If, in this case, the charge of schism be cast upon the four Brethren, it must be either because of the irregularity of their departure from the judicatories, the paucity of their number, the badness of the cause they have espoused, the equity of the sentence ejecting them, or their acting in an inconsistency with their ordination vows.

“ The *first* will not be alleged, in regard the four Brethren, whatever ground of withdrawing there might be from these men who were walking disorderly, yet they never went out of the judicatories till they were thrust out. It cannot be laid upon the *paucity* of their numbers when compared with the multitude against them ; because this would condemn Caleb and Joshua, Elijah, Micaiah, and, in short, all the witnesses that ever appeared for Christ and his cause in times of defection. Not the *badness* of their cause ; for, as they contended, according to their measure, for the covenanted doctrine, discipline, worship, and government of the Reformed Church of Scotland, before their ejection, so now that they are ejected they espouse no

other cause, as appears from their printed testimony, and grounds of secession. Is it because we *did not submit*, according to ordination vows, to the rebukes, suspensions, and other sentences of judicatories? I answer, if these sentences had been founded upon the word of God and the approved practice and acts of the Church of Scotland, our non-submission would, no doubt, have inferred the charge. But the case was quite otherwise; the sentences were arbitrary and inconsistent with the word of God, and the rules of the Church; and we could not submit to them without betraying a testimony, and prostituting our ministry to the pleasure of men, and so should not be the servants of Christ.

“Is it because, now that the door is opened, *we do not return* to the communion of the Established Church? I answer, that there is a difference to be made betwixt the Established Church of Scotland and the Church of Christ in Scotland; for I reckon that the last is in a great measure driven into the wilderness by the first. And since God, in his adorable providence, has led us into the wilderness with her, I judge it our duty to tarry with her for a while there, and to prefer her afflictions to all the advantages of a legal establishment, in communion with judicatories as they stand at present. And this I firmly believe is no schism before the Lord, whatever it may be reckoned in the eyes of the world. However, whenever it shall appear to me that the established judicatories are heartily adopting the cause of Christ, purging and planting his house according to his will, and the solemn covenants lying upon the land, and doing justice to his oppressed members through Scotland, I hope not only to return to

communion, but to enter the gates of our Zion with praise.

“ I know it is strenuously pleaded, that what was done by the last Assembly lays a sufficient ground for our accession, notwithstanding all that is past. I cannot help differing from those that are of this opinion. I humbly conceive there is a great difference betwixt a positive reformation, and a stop or sist given to a deformation. I am far from derogating from the stand made by the worthy members of the last Assembly against the career of the corrupt party. But allow me to say, that to me any thing done appears rather a check or restraint upon those men for a time, than any real cleanly reformation. We have not heard of their repenting of their evil deeds. The party are as numerous in judicatories, and acted [actuated] by the same spirit of defection as ever ; and, for the most part, carry the affairs of Christ’s kingdom, in inferior courts, in the same channel, since the Assembly 1734, as before.

“ Some Brethren call us to come in and help them against the current of defection. But now that the hand of Providence has taken us out of the current against which we were swimming, and set us upon the reformation ground by a solemn testimony and constitution, it would be vain for us to endanger ourselves by running into the current again, unless our reverend Brethren, who call for our help, can persuade us that our so doing will turn the current and save both them and ourselves, and so preserve the Lord’s work and testimony. In my opinion, it would be by far much safer for these Brethren to come out of the dangerous current to us, than for us now to come back to them, Jer. xv. 19–21. No doubt, worldly interest gives a strong

bias against this motion ; but if it be duty, we are bound to forsake all and follow the Lord.”

[Having thus repelled the charge of schism, the writer goes forward to point out particularly the important defects attending the repeal of the act 1730, with reference to the recording of dissents and protests ; and of the act 1732 relating to the settlement of vacant parishes ; and to show that the repeal was little better than nominal, and that no sufficient evidence was given of actual reformation, or of an abandonment of the corrupt principles of administration held by the prevailing party. In a subsequent paragraph, he candidly states his views of the highly unsatisfactory manner in which the unjust sentences passed against the four Brethren were removed. The Assembly had thought proper to remove them, merely on the ground of expediency, while all inquiry into the nature and cause of these sentences was strictly prohibited :]

“The last Assembly ordered the Synod of Perth and Stirling to cast open the doors, and invite us back to ministerial communion, which, accordingly, was done. But, were the sentences of rebuke, suspension, and excommunication declared groundless, arbitrary, or inconsistent with the word of God, and that ministerial freedom which God has allowed in witnessing publicly against public defections ? Nay, the Synod is expressly *inhibite* from meddling with any thing that was past *hinc inde* ; by which means truth falls in the streets, and the consideration of equity cannot enter, and the authority of the church interposed in these acts and censures still abides untouched, however *iniquous* ; only an attempt is made to remove the effect without touching the cause. But it is a good maxim, *ablata*

*causa, tollitur effectus.** And, by comparing the above inhibition laid upon the Synod of Perth act 8th, with what is said act 9th anent ministerial freedom, to me it is pretty evident, that the last Assembly were of opinion that the freedom used at the opening of the Synod of Perth, October 10, 1732, was neither due nor regular ; and, consequently, that the sentences that followed upon our adherence to that mite of a testimony were all just and equal, though the effects and consequences were like to be bad.”

[He then illustrates the general defection in the church, and the futility of the boasted appearances of reformation, by plainly reminding the Presbytery of their own lamentable inconsistency and flinching, in the case of Mr. Mackie, who was translated from Forteviot to St. Ninians. They at first rejected the pretended call, and refused to admit him, though loosed from his former charge by the Presbytery of Perth. When a Committee of the Assembly’s Commission met to admit him, they absolutely refused to give him their presence or countenance ; only three of their number attended “that clandestine meeting.” Yet now they suffered him to vote and act as a member of Presbytery ; the dissenters from his ministry, in that parish, were not allowed a deed in their favour, permitting them to apply for church privileges to other ministers of the Presbytery ; the three ministers who were present at his admission were not admonished for their conduct ;—and all this, adds Mr. Erskine, “in the very face of a Protestation to the contrary, entered by my worthy old colleague Mr. Hamilton.” “Whence is it that he is

* Take away the cause, and the effect will cease.

left to stand alone by his brethren, and his hoary hairs insulted, in his steady adherence to that cause which they themselves adopted, before the intruder got in among them?"

This faithful and spirited letter is concluded with the following words :]

"If the Reverend Presbytery pleases to insert this into their Records as my extended answer to their desire by the Rev. Mr. Muir and Mr. Lindsay the last Presbytery day, they will very much oblige,

Very Reverend Sir, Yours affectionately in our Lord,
EBENEZER ERSKINE.*

Stirling, Jan. 8, 1735.

In that passage of this letter where the writer rebuts the charge of schism preferred against himself and his three associates, he notices the attempt to found it on their declining to submit to the rebukes, suspensions, and other sentences pronounced against them by the judicatories. All human power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, has its limits. Whatever deference be due to the authority of lawfully constituted courts, and, particularly on the part of those who have promised subjection to them "in the Lord," decisions and sentences,

* This letter is contained in a small, and now extremely rare pamphlet, formerly referred to, entitled *The Testimony and Contentings of the Rev. Mr. Alex. Hamilton, &c.* pp. 69-80. Mr. Erskine, it is said, p. 69, caused deliver it into the Moderator's hand, January 8, 1735; and, being directed to him to be communicated, it was, after some struggle, read *coram*. The reader will do well to compare Mr. Erskine's views with those of his friend Mr. Wilson on the same topics, as expressed in Mr. Ferrier's *Memoirs of him*, pp. 278-299.

which are obviously contrary to the laws of God, and the dictates of an enlightened conscience, ought never to be acquiesced in. Who will now dare to affirm that the seceding Brethren did wrong in asserting the validity, and maintaining the exercise of their office, in spite of the sentences of suspension and deposition thundered against them by the General Assembly, or its Commission? "The Assembly of 1740," says a late author, "without finding them erroneous in doctrine, or presenting any charge of immorality against them, deposed them from the ministerial office in the Established Church."* Disobedience to such arbitrary and unrighteous decrees was not only innocent, but laudable and necessary; for they justly thought that, by abject submission, they would have betrayed a sacred trust, and preferred the pleasing of men to the service of Christ. In disregarding those unwarrantable decisions, too, we may remark, their conduct was only in accordance with that which has been exemplified, both before and since, by several excellent men, who have been treated with similar injustice. Let two instances suffice. Mr. JOHN HEPBURN, of Urr, in Galloway, whom some have called "the morning star of the Secession," when, in consequence of conscientious scruples respecting the oaths that were required of clergymen, he was deposed by the Assembly 1705, protested against the sentence, and continued to exercise his ministry till, in August 1707, the Assembly were pleased to restore him to his office. Mr. THOMAS GILLESPIE, one of the fathers of the Relief Church, for

* Hist. of the Christian Church, by the author of the Hist. of the Reformation, &c. vol. iii. p. 252.

refusing to concur in the violent settlement of a minister at Inverkeithing, was deposed from the ministry, and ejected from the parish of Carnock by the Assembly 1752; but he persisted to the day of his death in the discharge of his office, as if no such sentence had been passed, and became pastor of a respectable congregation at Dunfermline. The Christian meekness and dignity he discovered when the sentence was intimated to him, commanded the esteem of many who had voted for his deposition. He expressed himself in the following terms: "Moderator, I receive this sentence of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland with reverence and awe, on account of the Divine conduct in it; but I rejoice that it is given to me on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in his name, but also to suffer for his sake."*

The only other aspersions cast on Mr. Erskine's character to which we shall advert, are the vague charges of vanity, pride, and personal resentment. Insinuations to this effect were not only common in his own time, but have been hazarded by late writers, from whom more candid and honourable sentiments might have been looked for. Who would have expected that an eminent clergyman, commended by his friends for "the decided part he took in every struggle where the rights of the Christian people were invaded, or even threatened," would have allowed himself to inveigh against the Four Brethren as "popular demagogues among the clergy," or to attribute their secession merely to their keen feelings, irritated by the precipitate

* Memoir of the Rev. T. Gillespie, Ch. Monitor, vol. ii. p. 669.

measures of the courts? The treatment they met with was, indeed, in many instances, *confessedly* unjust and oppressive. Had they not felt it keenly, they must have been utterly void of the common sensibility of men; and, had no portion of human irritation ever mingled itself with their pious zeal for the glory of God, and the best interests of the church, they must have reached a height of angelical perfection seldom, if ever, attained in this mortal state. But if, as that writer is pleased to admit, “the ministers of the Secession were men of worth and principle,” neither resentment of injuries and indignities, however great, nor that mean ambition and contemptible vanity which characterize “the popular demagogue,” was the motive,—*certainly not the leading motive of their conduct*, in stating and maintaining a secession from the judicatories of the Church of Scotland. “Worth and principle” would have subdued the workings of resentment, and repressed the suggestions of ambition and vanity. But, convinced as they were, after mature deliberation, and earnest prayer for direction to the Father of lights, that, to withdraw from the established judicatories was their incumbent duty, “worth and principle” induced them to “go forth to Jesus without the camp, bearing his reproach.” Actuated by pure and elevated views, they chose rather to sacrifice strong prepossessions in favour of a mother-church, to forego the endearments of early friendship, to abandon comfortable benefices secured by the state, and to expose their reputation to torrents of obloquy, than to omit what appeared to them an important and necessary service to the cause of God and truth.

With pleasure we adopt the concluding words of a recent vindication of their conduct in refusing to re-

sume their connection with the established judicatories :

“ It is easy to impute to them motives arising from vanity, or from pride ; but besides that, the cause itself is independent of the motives of the men by whom it was conducted ; where is the proof that they were influenced by such motives ? There is abundant evidence that they were afraid of taking any precipitate step, that they abandoned, most reluctantly, the hope of exercising their ministry in that church in which they had been educated and ordained—waiting patiently for years before they proceeded to act fully in a judicative capacity ; and that they conducted themselves throughout with a dignified consistency, and with a scrupulous regard to Presbyterian order. To ascribe such tempers and conduct, either to a low passion for vulgar fame, or to a fanatical spirit, is equally contrary to candour and to common sense.”*

* Test. of the Unit. Assoc. Syn. pp. 51, 52.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Erskine's persevering fidelity at Stirling—Affair of the five Elders who annoyed him—His peaceable withdrawment from the Parish church—Erection of a spacious meeting-house—His increased popularity and usefulness—Active exertions in promoting the object of the Secession—General prosperity of the cause—Correspondence with the Rev. Gabriel Wilson, and George Whitefield—Covenanting—Loyalty during the Rebellion 1745-6—Conduct with regard to the Breach 1747—Mr. Erskine chosen Professor of Divinity.

DURING the whole intervening period between the sentence of suspension passed by the Commission in 1733, and that of deposition pronounced by the Assembly in the year 1740, Mr. Erskine continued to officiate in the church originally assigned him at Stirling, and to perform with diligence, and with general approbation, the various duties of his office. The warm and steadfast friendship of Mr. Hamilton, his aged and venerable colleague, particularly cheered him. That good man fully concurred with him in his views of Christian liberty, as well as evangelical doctrine, and never ceased to show him the most cordial regard, till it pleased God to remove him by death in January 1738. Mr. Hamilton discovered his attachment to the cause of the Associate Presbytery, both by offering up his prayers for them in

the sanctuary, and by taking his seat amongst them at their meetings, when he had an opportunity.

The kindness shown by the Kirk-Session, and by the body of the people, was also exceedingly encouraging. Certain measures, however, were adopted by five members of Session, which annoyed both ministers, and which Mr. Hamilton repeatedly spoke of as calculated to "bring his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." The sum of this unpleasant affair is as follows.* These five elders had lived on the same terms of friendship with their ministers as their brethren in office, and united with them in condemning the violent proceedings of the church courts. But soon after Mr. Mackie's admission, and, as is alleged, at his instigation, they began to alter their conduct. They absented themselves from the meetings of Session; and in consequence, a little before the administration of the Lord's Supper in spring 1737, they were "gravely and judiciously rebuked" by Mr. Hamilton for their repeated neglects. Irritated at this reproof, they became still more refractory, and watched an opportunity of molesting their pastors. The intimation respecting communicants, which the two ministers, as was formerly stated,† had agreed to make, proving offensive to such parishioners as were hostile to serious piety, the five elders were prompted to make that intimation, and the corresponding procedure which followed, a ground of complaint. At a meeting of Session held soon after the close of the sacramental solemnity for distributing collections among

* Most of the particulars here related are taken from the Copy of the Libel, &c. with the Assoc. Presbytery's Remarks upon it, Re-exhibition, p. 192, *et seq.*

† Pages 342-3.

the poor, these men appeared with a protest full of injurious reflections on their ministers and fellow-elders ; declaring, in particular, that all the deeds of the Session should be considered null and void, while Mr. Erskine sat there as Moderator or member. This protest having been carried to the superior courts, these five elders were countenanced by the dominant clergy, and even declared to be *the only Session* of Stirling, while the other twelve elders, who had adhered to their ministers in the faithful exercise of discipline, were summarily condemned. The magistrates of Stirling, meantime, interposed their authority, by prohibiting *the twelve*, though “not actually suspended from any part of their office,” to collect the offerings for the poor ; and by appointing *the five*, exclusively, to stand at the church doors for that purpose. Under these singular circumstances, Mr. Erskine deemed it his duty, as minister of the place, on Sabbath the 25th Feb. 1739, being the first day that the five elders collected by appointment of the magistrates, to bear testimony in presence of the congregation against this intrusion. With great solemnity and dignity, he protested against it as an invasion of the prerogative of Christ, a violent thrust at his own ministry, a robbery committed upon the congregation, and an injury to its lawful rulers—now thrust out by an erastian and tyrannical authority, without any libel, process, or pretended crime. Nay, he went a step further. In the name of the Lord of hosts, he summoned “the five pretended and intruded elders” by name and surname, to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ to answer for their conduct ; and warned all in the congregation under his inspection to beware of countenancing these five men as lawful officers in

the church of Christ, as they would not partake of their sin and punishment.* After the lapse of a few months, he called on the congregation to make a new election of elders to co-operate with the twelve, whom he considered as the only "lawful Session." This appears from the following memorandum, copied from his 43d Note-book :

"*Memorandum.*—Remember to intimate the design of an election of new officers for discipline and regulating the affairs of the poor. You all know into what confusion we and this congregation are cast, through the arbitrary conduct of the judicatories in imposing five elders upon us, whom the great body of the congregation have not freedom to own ; by which means the comely order of the house of God is disturbed, discipline is broken, profanity encouraged, the collections are withheld, and the poor starved ; all which are crying evils in this place. I know no power or authority, civil or ecclesiastical, in the land, that is capable to rectify this evil, but the congregation itself. Their charity to the poor is their own ; and they only have the power to choose their own officers, who are to exercise discipline, and to manage their collections by disposing thereof unto proper objects. This is a natural right which pertains unto every society of men, and confirmed to the Church by a Divine warrant, and

* A complete copy of this protest may be seen in the Re-exhibition, pp. 203-4. The names of the five elders, as mentioned there, are Henry Christie, William Maben, Robert Banks, Andrew Millar, Henry Allan. We observe the names of all of them, with the exception of Henry Christie, among the subscribers of the Representation of the Kirk-Session of Stirling in favour of Mr. E. Erskine, presented to the Synod of Perth and Stirling in April 1733.

the practice of the Apostles, Acts vi. Where you see, that when the affairs of the church, particularly that concerning the poor, were in confusion, it was found needful that proper officers should be chosen to manage these matters. The Apostles, though they were divinely inspired, and under an infallible conduct, would not take upon them to intrude officers upon the church in an arbitrary way. No, truly; but they refer the election to the multitude of the disciples, and then proceed to their ordination. This is the primitive way; and in order to bring the affairs of the poor and discipline to the right channel, I desire that this congregation—I mean such as submit to the laws and ordinances of Christ, and have a resolution through grace to cleave to him—I desire all such in this congregation to meet together on Wednesday next, after sermon, in order to the regular election of church officers; and I shall endeavour to moderate in the election, and then proceed, in conjunction with the lawful Session that is in being, towards their ordination.”

The protest against the five Elders was regarded in so odious a light by the Commission of the General Assembly, that they made it a special article of Libel against Mr. Erskine. In the Remarks on the Libel, however, it is observed that this reprobated step was neither unprecedented, nor inconsistent with the duty of a minister, when unjust sentences are passed to the detriment of Christ's kingdom, and no probable method of redress presents itself. For instances of similar proceedings, the Presbytery refer to Mr. *Andrew Duncan*, minister at Crail, and Mr. *John Scrimgeour*, at Kinghorn, who protested against the sentences of deposition and imprisonment pronounced by the High Com-

mission Court in 1619-20, and summoned its members to answer for themselves at the tribunal of the righteous Judge of all the earth ;—also to Mr. Robert Blair, who acted in the same manner towards *Eckline*, Bishop of Bangor, who had ventured to silence him.

The conduct of the judicatories and of the magistrates in reference to these intruded elders, it is evident, was at once arbitrary and injurious ; and even admitting that Mr. Erskine's zeal did, in this instance, somewhat exceed the bounds of strict propriety, it seems clear that decisive measures, calculated to repel the aggression and remedy the evil, were indispensably necessary.

When the Assembly deposed the eight seceding ministers, it was intended, as we have seen, to deprive them of all the temporal emoluments connected with their office. Nothing else was expected by these Brethren themselves, and they stood prepared for the sacrifice. Though it is alleged that, by resolutely availing themselves of a certain act of parliament passed in the reign of Queen Anne, they might probably have retained each of them his church, his manse, and his stipend, till the day of his death, they were inclined rather to relinquish their civil rights, than to maintain them by methods which they regarded as questionable or inexpedient.

In conformity to the final sentence of Assembly pronounced on the 15th May, 1740, letters of intimation were immediately despatched from the Moderator to the proper civil authorities, that the decision might be forthwith carried into effect. In some of the parishes concerned, however, the ministers were treated with comparative lenity, and permitted to keep possession of their churches

till their followers had time to erect places of worship for their accommodation. But no such forbearance was exercised at Stirling. The very first Lord's day after the sentence of deposition was passed, a party of the magistrates of that burgh, eager to evince their devotedness to the existing powers, thought proper to prohibit the ringing of the church-bells, and to make fast the doors of the church and church-yard, to prevent admission. The people, nevertheless, met at the usual hour, intending to break open the doors; but Mr. Erskine, when he made his appearance, expressed his decided aversion to methods of violence, and succeeded in dissuading them from the attempt.

In the presence of a vast multitude assembled on this interesting occasion, it is said, he lifted up the pulpit Bible, which, according to the custom of the times, he had brought with him from his house, and in a manner awfully solemn and impressive, protested as in the Divine presence, that he was pursuing the path of duty, and that not he, but his opposers were responsible at the tribunal of God, for the events of that day. Having heard with deep emotion this affecting appeal, the people quietly retired to a convenient spot in the open air, where he conducted the public services of the Sabbath.

By this prudent and peaceable conduct he justified the character which the magistrates of Stirling themselves had given him seven years before, when, in their Representation to the Commission, they affirmed that they had found him to be a man of a *peaceable disposition*. We find him, in like manner, breathing the spirit of peace and forgiveness towards these rulers in the conclusion of a sermon preached at the ordination of Mr. James Erskine as his assistant and successor,

twelve years after his ejection from what he calls "the legal synagogue and maintenance." Having alluded to the harsh treatment given both to Mr. Hamilton and himself, he adds: "All that I shall say upon the head is, with my royal Master, when they were taking away his life, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;' and with the proto-martyr Stephen, when they were stoning him to death, and when he was going out of time into eternity, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'"*

His dignified and peaceful conduct was the natural effect of those divine consolations by which he was sustained. Amidst afflicting vicissitudes, he improved with fresh ardour his access to the throne of grace, and availed himself of those never-failing sources of comfort which the Scriptures afford. When forsaken by men who had once befriended him, he was cheered by his Master's promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." When thrust out from a Church to which he was warmly attached, and whose prosperity he had laboured to advance, he adored the over-ruling providence of his heavenly Father, saying, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." When called to go forth without the camp, and to encounter difficulties formerly unknown, he recollected that animating passage; "The Breaker is come up before them; they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it; and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."†

* Works, vol. ii. pp. 694-5.

† Ps. lxxvi. 10. Mic. ii. 13. Works, vol. ii. pp. 1, 600.

We shall here mention, in the same terms in which they are expressly noted by himself in his manuscripts, a few more texts from which he delivered practical and consolatory sermons, during the course of these trying occurrences.

“I entered on the following text, June 1738, on occasion of the act of Assembly with relation to the five Elders of Stirling : Gal. v. 1. ‘Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.’

“*Stirling, Sabbath, May 11, 1740.*—The Assembly sitting for deposing the Associate Ministers : Psalm cxviii. 8. ‘It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.’

“*May 18, 1740*—being the Sabbath on which I was turned out of the church : Matt. viii. 27. ‘But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him !’

“At the sacrament of Stirling *in the fields*, being cast out of the church by the magistrates of the place, in consequence of the sentence of the last Assembly—Sabbath, Oct. 19, 1740 : Col. ii. 10. ‘And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.’

“*Stirling, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 1740*—being the same day that two ministers took possession of my pulpit, viz. Messrs. *Turner* and *M^cQueen* : Psalm cxlix. 2. —‘Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.’”

Even external circumstances proved, in many respects, encouraging. Satisfied with regard to the soundness of his views, the purity of his motives, and the rectitude of his conduct, his people, with comparatively few exceptions, concurred with him in seceding

from the established judicatories. For more than seventy years after the memorable crisis of 1740, the West Church, which had been the scene of his public ministrations, remained unoccupied. The late Dr. Sommerville made the following statement in the year 1793 : " Since the deposition of Mr. Erskine, the third charge at Stirling has never been filled ; it was allowed to fall into disuse by the Presbytery."* The increased population of the town, however, gave occasion to its revival in the year 1817.

The numerous congregation which adhered to Mr. Erskine proceeded, with all possible expedition, to erect for his and their own accommodation, a very spacious place of worship ; in which, for upwards of twelve years, he continued, with delight and with success, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. In addition to his old parishioners, many from contiguous parishes on all sides, to the distance of ten miles, placed themselves under his ministry ; including a considerable number of respectable ruling Elders, who, being received into his Session, greatly assisted him in visiting the sick, and in watching over the morals of his flock. It is scarcely necessary to add that they found no difficulty in providing for his temporal subsistence ; and that the loss of his legal stipend was more than compensated, by remunerations voluntarily and cheerfully bestowed by a people deeply grateful for his valuable labours in the Gospel.

Nor were his ministrations confined to his own charge. With redoubled activity, he aided his Breth-

* Stat. Acc. of Scotland, vol. viii. p. 271, &c.

ren of the Associate Presbytery in administering the Lord's Supper to their respective congregations. In their zealous exertions, too, for promoting the general interest of religion in the land, and for affording relief to multitudes groaning under the yoke of ecclesiastical tyranny, he willingly contributed his full proportion. We find from his Note-books that he preached, and, in some instances, conducted the services of a solemn fast, at *Fenwick*, at *Airdrie*, at *Glasgow*, at *Kilmaronoc*, at *Kilmacolm*, at *Balfron*, and at *Dunse*. He preached on 1 Cor. iii. 11. at the ordination of Mr. DAVID SMYTON at *Kilmaurs*, in Nov. 1740 ; and being appointed to preside at the admission of Mr. FISHER, his son-in-law, at Glasgow, Oct. 8, 1741, he preached a faithful and lively sermon from Psalm cxxxii. 17.—‘I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.’

The services undertaken by the eight Brethren beyond the boundaries of their own parishes, formed one article of the Libel with which they were served, and were represented as occasioning the neglect of their proper duty at home. “Not confining yourselves to your own congregation and particular charges, you dispense ordinances to persons of other congregations, without the knowledge or consent of the ministers to which they belong ; and have taken upon you, in some of these congregations, to ordain elders, to appoint and keep fasts in different corners of the country ; and by these practices your proper ministerial work in your own parishes is in a great measure neglected.”—In reply to the last part of this charge, they express themselves in the following terms : “They may be satisfied to have their diligence compared, in their ministerial work in their own parishes, with that of their keenest

accusers ; and they may likewise confidently affirm that, notwithstanding of their Presbyterial association, and the duty which it does oblige them unto, they are as little diverted from their proper ministerial work in their respective charges, as when they were in connection with the judicatories, and approved by them for their diligence.”*

Amidst his laborious efforts, both at home and abroad, Mr. Erskine was cheered, not only by the flourishing condition of his own flock, but by the general prosperity of the Secession cause. He had not indeed the happiness to obtain the co-operation of every minister, whom at one time he might have expected to join him. In the subsequent history of his seven clerical friends, who solemnly protested against the sentence of the Commission, Nov. 1733, dissolving the relation betwixt the four Brethren and their several charges, we may notice the following particulars. Three of them, as we have seen, became seceders—Messrs. Ralph Erskine and Thomas Mair in February, and Mr. Thomas Nairn in September, 1737. Mr. Maclaren, of Edinburgh, departed this life in June 1734. Mr. Wardlaw, of Dunfermline, survived, we think, till a short time after the sentence of deposition was passed on his colleague and the other Associate ministers ; but died in communion with the national church. Mr. Currie, of Kinglassie, became an open and violent antagonist to the Associate Presbytery, wrote several pamphlets against them, and was answered with great learning and ability by Mr. William Wilson, of Perth.

* Re-exhibition, pp. 190, 199.

Mr. GABRIEL WILSON, of Maxton, in fine, who took the lead in entering the protest against the deed of the Commission, notwithstanding mutual expressions of regard which afterwards passed between him and the seceding Brethren, adopted views of church government that effectually precluded him from joining their association, or concurring in their measures.

The following letter from Mr. Erskine to this excellent man is entitled to a place here, as a memorial of their mutual esteem for each other, as well as a proof of the writer's earnest desire to possess his correspondent's brotherly countenance and co-operation in the cause of truth. It is copied from a draught in shorthand characters, Note-book 42d.

“ Copy of a Letter to Master Gabriel Wilson, minister of Maxton.

“ R. D. B.

“ I had the favour of yours some weeks ago, and my heart warmed when I read your name at the bottom of it. I have been pained several times since I received it, lest my long delay of an answer should be thought a want of respect, while it flows only from want of time. If you knew my situation here alone, where there is work for three or four, I am sure you would easily excuse my delay.

“ It very much gladdened my heart to hear of your resolution of seeing me in Stirling. I catch hold of your word, and urge you to make it good ; for I assure you of the *kindest welcome*, whatever jealousy you may have entertained of any estrangement or alienation on my side. As I am persuaded I have still an interest in your heart, so I can assure you, you have great room

in mine, as an intimate Comrade, a great Christian, a dear Brother, and an eminent Divine and Minister of Christ. I hope not only to be edified by your conversation, and the thoughts you speak of upon honouring our dear Lord, but to be refreshed with your discourses in the pulpit of Stirling, where I can promise you a numerous and attentive auditory.

“As for the way I am in of secession from the present judicatories, and, in conjunction with my Brethren, of endeavouring to witness for the Lord, and to feed and relieve his scattered and bleating sheep and lambs, I bless the Lord that ever employed my Brethren and me in this service. And though the archers shoot sore at us and grieve our hearts, and Mr. *Currie*, among the keenest, yet, I hope the blessing of the Shepherd of Israel, and of many thousands of his sheep, shall compensate all the wounds we receive. And, oh ! how would my heart rejoice to see my dear good angel GABRIEL coming in to share of these blessings with us.—I see by the act of Assembly what we are to expect from the hands of men ; but none of these things, I hope, shall move me, and I desire not to account my life dear, that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received from the Lord. I am here set as a mark. All the world are shooting their arrows of reproach at me, and none more than our malignant Presbyterians, whose bow Mr. Currie has mended, and whose quiver he has filled with arrows ; for which I pray, ‘Lord, lay it not to his charge—Father, forgive him.’

“His arguings do not move me, in regard they do not hit the question in which I and my Brethren are concerned. You see the question in which we are con-

cerned, stated by Mr. Wilson in his letter to Mr. Wardlaw. Mr. Currie, I see, in his reply to Mr. Wilson, drops the main cause, and argues only to vindicate his own character, wherein he thinks Mr. Wilson has rubbed upon him. I do not enter upon the argument with you, referring any thing of that nature until the conversation you have given me ground to expect with you here.

“I am sorry if any thing hinted by Mr. Fisher or Mr. Moncrieff has offended you ; and yet more so, if there were any just ground for a warning against the evil at which they pointed ; I mean independency. I always took you for one of the most confirmed Presbyterians and assertors of the obligation of our Covenants of any in Scotland, and am absolutely averse from receiving any report to the contrary, unless I have it from your own mouth or pen ; which indeed would give a deep wound to my spirit, and to many others who have a great regard for you. The removing of land-marks, especially in the kingdom of Christ, and an altering of the mould or pins of the tabernacle of David, is exceedingly dangerous, and is what I persuade myself you will never go into, either by word or writ.

“I hope it will be very agreeable to you and many others in your country, that Mr. Hunter is licensed. Your character and commendation of him recommended him much to me.*—I am, very dear Gabriel,

Your most affectionate Brother and servant, in
our dear Lord, Immanuel,

EBENEZER ERSKINE.

* He refers to Mr. John Hunter, a young man of great promise, who was the first individual licensed, and the first ordained, by the Associate Presbytery. He was licensed at Abernethy, May 12, 1738, and ordained at Gateshall, Minister of the United

“*P.S.*—I have obeyed your orders as to secrecy. None living has seen yours to me ; and I am content you do the same with mine. I told some I had one from you, and was to write you. What time was bestowed on this was taken off my sleep, being begun this day about three in the morning.”

Whatever views the reader may entertain on the disputed points referred to in this letter, he can scarcely fail to regard the letter itself as equally affectionate, candid, and faithful. Whether this “good angel, Gabriel,” complied with his friend’s urgent invitation to make him a visit, and to preach to his people at Stirling, we have not learned ; but it is certain that he declined connecting himself with the Associate Presbytery. The report of his leaning towards Independency, which had reached the members of that Presbytery, was found to be true ; for soon after, he formed a small church at Maxton on the Independent plan, which met on Sabbath evenings—while he regularly preached to his parishioners at large, and baptised their children, but did not administer to them the Lord’s Supper. Connived at by the judicatories of the establishment, he persisted in this method of exercising his ministry till his death, which took place in the beginning of the year 1750.* His friend, Mr. Henry Davidson, of Ga-

Congregations of Morbattle and Stitchell, Oct. 17, 1739. It pleased a sovereign providence to remove him by death, the 17th Jan. 1740—somewhat less than three months after his ordination. See some account of his character subjoined to a sermon preached at his settlement by the Rev. Ralph Erskine, in his Works, vol. ii. pp. 101-118.

* Struth. Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. Book viii.

lashiels, having embraced the same sentiments, acted a similar part, and met with similar indulgence.

Mr. Erskine sustained another disappointment, when the Rev. GEORGE WHITEFIELD refused to co-operate with him in the manner asked and expected. Having received favourable accounts respecting the character and doctrine of this celebrated man, and the extraordinary success of his ministry in England and America, he affectionately invited him to make a visit to Scotland, and to unite his efforts with those of the Associate Presbytery in promoting the interests of truth and godliness. A letter from Mr. Erskine to Mr. Whitefield, a short-hand copy of which we have discovered in his 38th Note-book, throws some light on the views and motives which influenced him and his Brethren in giving him that invitation. Several expressions are illegible. We give the following extracts :

“ *Hilldown, near Dunbar, June 1741.*

“ Rev. and very dear Brother.

“ I inclined much to have written you as soon as I heard of your return to England ; but I was at a loss for want of a direction, till I received yours from Bristol of the 16th of May, which was very acceptable. Though I have not yet seen your last Journal, yet I have heard of it, and of the great things God has done for you and by you in the American world, and at home also, in this island of the sea ; which brings that doxology to mind—‘ Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.’ May you be enabled more and more to be joyful in his salvation, and in the name of your God to set up your

banner. The banner which God has given you to display, because of truth, is far more glorious than that of [Admiral] VERNON. But I know that you are disposed to say, ‘Not I, but the grace of God in me;’ ‘Not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory.’

“How desirable would it be to all the sincere lovers of Jesus Christ in Scotland, to see him ‘travelling in the greatness of his strength’ among us also in your ministrations! Truth falls in our streets. Equity cannot enter into our ecclesiastical courts. As our Assembly did last year eject us from our churches, and exclude us from our ministry and legal maintenance, for lifting up our reformation testimony, so all I can hear they have done this year, May last, is to appoint several violent intrusions to be made upon Christian congregations; whereby the flock of Christ is scattered more and more upon the mountains; for a stranger will they not follow, who know the shepherd’s voice. The wandering sheep come with their bleatings to the Associate Presbytery; whereby our work is daily increasing, in feeding and rallying our Master’s flock, scattered and offended by the Established Church.

“From this short glimpse of the state of matters among us, you will easily see what reason the Associate Presbytery have to say, Come over to Scotland and help us, Come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty; for the enemy comes in like a flood, but I hope the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. We hear that God is with you of a truth, and therefore we wish for as intimate a connexion with you in the Lord as possible, for building up the fallen tabernacle of David in Britain; and particularly in Scotland, when you shall be sent to us. This, dear Brother, and no party

views, is at the bottom of any proposal made by my brother Ralph in his own name, and in the name of his Associate Brethren. It would be very unreasonable to propose or urge that you should incorporate as a member of our Presbytery, and wholly embark in every branch of our reformation, unless the Father of lights were clearing your way thereunto; which we pray he may enlighten in his time, so as you and we may see eye to eye. All intended by us at present is, that, when you come to Scotland, your way may be such as not to strengthen the hands of our corrupt clergy and judicatories, who are carrying on a course of defection, worming out a faithful ministry from the land, and the power of religion with it. . . . Far be it from us to limit your great Master's commission to preach the gospel to every creature. We ourselves preach the gospel to all promiscuously who are willing to hear us. But we preach not upon the call and invitation of the ministers, but of the people, which, I suppose, is your own practice now in England; and should this also be your way when you come to Scotland, it could do the Associate Presbytery no manner of harm. But if, besides, you could find freedom to company with us, to preach with us and for us, and to accept of our advices in your work while in this country, it might contribute much to weaken the enemy's hand, and to strengthen our's in the work of the Lord, when the strength of the battle is against us.

“ These things I only propose with all submission. The Lord himself, I pray and hope, will direct you to such a course and conduct as shall be for his own glory and the edification of his Church every where, and particularly among us in Scotland. We in this country

are generally a lifeless, lukewarm, and *upsitten* generation. What a blessing would it be to us, if your visit should be attended with such fruits and effects as at Boston; an account of which I have read in your last to my brother Ralph—which yields great matter of thanksgiving.

“ I am truly sorry for the *Wesleyans*—to see them so far left to themselves. I have seen your letter to them, and praise the Lord on your behalf, who enables you to stand up so valiantly for the truth, and with so much light and energy. May his truth be more and more your shield and buckler.

“ I am, Your unworthy and affectionate Brother,
“ EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

Mr Whitefield's letter from Bristol*, referred to at the beginning of this epistle, shows that Mr. Erskine's cordial esteem was, on his part, warmly reciprocated. Yet in that and other communications, while he assured the members of the Associate Presbytery of his particular respect, and told them “ that he was more of their mind as to many things than they were perhaps aware of;” he candidly stated, that, as to church government, he intended to be “ quite neuter,” and “ came simply to preach the Gospel, and not to enter into any particular connection whatever.” When he accomplished his intended visit to Scotland in 1741, he and the Seceding Brethren soon found that their sentiments on several points were too discordant to admit of the co-operation proposed. The circumstances of their

* This letter may be seen in the Collection of Mr. Whitefield's Letters, vol. i. No. 280.

parting, the plan of operation which Mr Whitefield adopted, the countenance given him by the orthodox clergy of the Establishment, the extraordinary appearances known by the name of the *Cambuslang Work*, the opposite views that were held of that apparent revival, the mutual recriminations it gave rise to between the church-men and the Seceders—these are points of which it is not our intention to attempt even an outline*.

“ The differences of good men,” as Erasmus Middleton remarks, when alluding to this very subject, “ are never to be mentioned but with sorrow†.” Mr. Whitefield himself has the following expressions in a short but very kind and respectful letter to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, bearing date June 10, 1742. “ It is some concern to me that our differences as to outward things should cut off our sweet fellowship and communion with each other. God knows my heart, I highly value and honour you. . . . I could drop a tear. Oh! when shall the time come, when the watchmen shall see eye to eye. Hasten that time, our Lord, and our God‡.” Candour requires us frankly to acknowledge, that, whatever provocation was given to the ministers of the Secession, and whatever irregularities deserving reprehension had been committed by their ecclesiastical opponents, they expressed themselves in their public deeds, and some of them in their sermons and writings, in terms of unqualified severity

* What occurred between Mr. Whitefield and the Associate Presbytery, in their interview at Dunfermline, will fall to be noticed in a *Life of Mr. Ralph Erskine*.

† *Evang. Biog.* vol. iv. *Acc. of Mr. R. Erskine*, pp. 280-2.

‡ *Collect.* vol. i. *Let.* 425.

respecting Mr. Whitefield's ministry, and those ministers and people by whom he was countenanced, which Seceders have, for a long time past, almost universally regarded with feelings of sincere regret.

It is worth while, however, as some have suggested, to inquire into the accuracy of a sweeping prediction delivered by Mr. Whitefield with oracular solemnity; "that the Associate Presbytery were building a Babel, and that he believed it would soon tumble down about their ears." The edifice commenced by that Presbytery, has now lasted for almost a century; and no candid observer of its appearance, extent, and apparent stability, can conclude, either that its founders were such unskilful builders, or that their enterprize was so obnoxious to the frowns of heaven, as that good man was pleased to imagine. However great the faults and mistakes which have attached to Seceders themselves in their individual and collective capacities, and however virulent the reproaches and powerful the opposition they have met with from adversaries, the Secession Church has become a fair, strong, and extensive fabric—in no great danger, so far as human probability can determine, of soon tumbling into ruins. To change the figure; this vine, though once feeble and despised, has taken deep root, and filled the land; its boughs are sent forth on every side; the hills are covered with its shadow, and the vallies refreshed with its fruit. Metaphorical language apart; the Secession has, by the blessing of God, been subservient, in an eminent degree, to the interests of religious liberty, evangelical truth, and vital godliness. In addition to the good which it is directly the means of achieving, it

has without doubt been indirectly beneficial, to a great extent, in checking the progress of defection, and in “provoking to jealousy” those who have remained within the pale of the national establishment. A considerable number of its ministers have given satisfactory evidence, as well of learning and ability, as of piety, prudence, and pastoral fidelity. Some of them have attained distinguished eminence in the pulpit, whilst others have sent from the press very valuable works on theology, and other departments of knowledge. Passing over the useful writings of the first founders of the Secession, as well as the productions of its living ministers, some of whom have acquired great celebrity, we might refer to the publications of the Rev. John Brown of Haddington, William M'Ewen, Archibald Hall, George Jerment, Dr. George Lawson, and others; several of which, at least, have been long known and valued among Christians of almost every persuasion. The people, too, in communion with the Secession Church, form a very considerable proportion, if not of the most opulent, yet of the most intelligent, industrious, and virtuous part of the community. The congregations under the inspection of the United Associate Synod amount to upwards of three hundred and thirty. Nor must we overlook the other respectable, though minor branches of the Secession in Scotland; or the sister churches in Ireland, and different parts of America, whose exertions for the preservation and diffusion of the true Christian doctrine have been of great importance and utility.

Even at the commencement of the Secession, there were many auspicious omens of its future success.

While the Associate Presbytery was honoured with numerous applications for a pure dispensation of the Gospel from all quarters of the country, Divine Providence enabled them, to a considerable extent, to meet these demands. In November 1736, they entrusted to one of their number, the Rev. William Wilson of Perth, the momentous charge of teaching Theology to Candidates for the sacred office. Mr. Wilson entered on the work the following spring. The number of his students was encouraging. In the year 1741 they were more numerous than those who attended the Professors of Theology in any of the Scottish Universities, with the exception of Edinburgh*. In the course of that year nine of them were licensed to preach the Gospel; and before the close of 1742, the Presbytery consisted of twenty ministers, including twelve who had received ordination from them within about two years preceding, with the Rev. ANDREW ARROT, minister of the parish of *Dunnichen*, Angusshire, who acceded to them in October 1742; and not including Mr. Wilson, who died before the conclusion of 1741. On the 11th October 1744, a new arrangement was adopted, by which the Associate Presbytery became a Synod, consisting of three Presbyteries almost equal in numbers,—the Presbyteries of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dunfermline. The first meeting of the ASSOCIATE SYNOD was held at Stirling on the first Tuesday of March 1745; at which period it had under its inspection about thirty settled congregations, and sixteen vacancies in Scot-

* This is affirmed by Mr. Ralph Erskine, in a Letter to Mr. Whitefield, dated April 10, 1741.

land, besides several congregations in Ireland. Mr. Erskine, in short, found abundant matter of satisfaction and gratitude in the early progress of the cause in which he had taken so deep an interest, and acted so prominent a part. In defiance of all the measures employed to crush it in the bud, its success was rapid and extensive. Multitudes availed themselves of the relief which it afforded from the galling yoke of patronage, and listened to the pure doctrines of the cross, with every appearance of serious attention and spiritual benefit. In most of the principal towns in the Lowlands of Scotland, as well as in several less populous places, evangelical pastors were settled, whose labours eminently tended to promote the best interests of their hearers.

With a view to unite the friends of truth, and to strengthen their hands in the work of reformation, the Associate Presbytery thought proper to revive the practice of *Public Covenanting*. A great veneration for the National Covenants had generally prevailed among the religious Presbyterians of Scotland, both clergy and laity. They were accustomed to recognize their lasting obligation, to regard the contempt with which they had been treated during the unhappy reigns of the two Brothers as a heinous provocation to God, and to lament all the sins of the nation as receiving a deeper dye, from the circumstance that they were a violation of the public vows resting on Scotland as a covenanted land. Among the prevailing sins enumerated and deplored in a "Testimony" emitted soon after the commencement of the Secession, by a number of Ministers of the *Established Church*, express notice is taken of

“denying the lawfulness or obligation of our national Covenant engagements.”* It is not wonderful, therefore, that it early occurred to the seceding clergy, in the novel circumstances in which they were placed, that an attempt to restore the observance of covenanting would be proper and seasonable. A draught of an Act respecting this measure, which had been deliberately prepared by a Committee of Presbytery, was laid on their table at Edinburgh in October 1741, at the same meeting at which the valuable Act respecting the Doctrine of Grace was passed. It was entitled “The Overture of an Act of the Associate Presbytery for renewing the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three nations, in a way and manner agreeable to our present situation and circumstances in this period.” This overture, after having been read and corrected, was approved of by all the members present, with the exception of Mr. *Nairn*; who, having embraced the principles of the Old Dissenters with regard to the existing civil government, ultimately withdrew from the Associate Presbytery, and, in August 1743, joined Mr. John M‘Millan in forming an ecclesiastical court, entitled *The Reformed*

* This Testimony is entitled “A Fair and Impartial Testimony, essayed in name of a number of Ministers, Elders, and Christian people of the Church of Scotland, unto the laudable principles, wrestlings, and attainments of that Church, and against the backslidings, corruptions, divisions, and prevailing evils, both of former and present times.” It was composed chiefly by the Rev. John Willison, of Dundee, author of the *Sacramental Directory*, and other practical Works. See some account of its occasion and contents in *Struth. Hist. of Scotland*, vol. ii. pp. 98-111.

Presbytery. After various subsequent meetings, and after further amendments of the proposed act for renovation of the Covenants; it was finally adopted by the Presbytery at Stirling, Dec. 23, 1743. They agreed also to proceed without delay to this solemn service, the ministers only taking part in the work at the first, and giving an example to the people, which they were expected in due time to follow. Accordingly, on the 28th of the same month, which was observed as a day of public fasting by the congregation of Stirling, all the ministers present, to the number of fifteen, united in the acknowledgment of sins and engagement to duties, and subscribed the engagement or bond, in the presence of a numerous assembly. On the 14th of March ensuing, four ministers who were not present at Stirling, and one subsequently ordained, joined in the same exercise at Falkirk.*

That these proceedings met the approbation of the subject of this memoir, cannot admit of a doubt. To diffuse information on the topic, he had been at the trouble to collect and publish what he esteemed the best discourses on the nature and obligation of the Covenants.† From the circumstance of the work commencing at Stirling, as well as from the tenor of the sermon he preached on that occasion, it is manifest that he cordially approved of the measure. In the Preface to the sermon he observes, that it appeared to him there was “somewhat remarkable in the place of the begun resurrection of the covenants, namely, in the town of Stirling, where that faithful witness, Mr. JAMES

* Gibb's Display, vol. i. pp. 251, 252.

† Christian Monitor, vol. i. p. 68.

GUTHRIE, minister of the place, was stoned, and otherwise maltreated and abused by a malignant party, for his faithful adherence to the covenanted reformation, and who also suffered martyrdom in the same cause in the Grass-market of Edinburgh.”*

Whilst biographical fidelity required that this solemn transaction should not be passed over in silence, it is not the writer's intention, either to vindicate or to discuss its propriety. Human nature is prone to extremes. The warmest admirers of the first ministers of the Secession will admit that, in some instances, their zeal was carried to excess. Few, if any, will now justify that act of the Associate Presbytery, passed at Edinburgh, Feb. 14, 1744, by which the swearing of the Covenant-bond, which they had prepared, was constituted a term of Ministerial and Christian communion. “Not a few of the seceding ministers,” says a conscientious writer, well versed in their history, “were afterwards sensible of the sinfulness of this act; nor do I know that ever the most zealous for covenanting acted up to the tenor of it.”† At the distance of thirty years from the date of the act, it is affirmed by the Rev. Adam Gibb, that “so far as he knows, or can remember, there has been no instance of any of the people being kept back from sealing ordinances for not joining in covenanting work—but they have always been waited for till *willingly offering themselves*.”‡ The act itself, it is proper to state, enjoined the exercise of “much tenderness and lenity towards the weakest of

* Works of Rev. E. Erskine, vol. ii. p. 316.

† Brown's Histor. Acc. of the Secession, pp. 58, 59.

‡ Display of the Secession Testimony, vol. i. p. 253.

the flock, that they may not be, at first instance, secluded from sealing ordinances."

There is reason to believe that Mr. Erskine, among others, lived to regret the strictness with which covenanting was required, or to say the least, the eagerness with which it was inculcated on the members of the Secession Church. Nor are we to imagine that he and his Brethren, though heartily attached to the doctrines of the Reformation, and to the Presbyterian government and discipline, did *at any time* approve of every public measure pursued by the original covenanters. Whatever specious pretext their renovation of the Covenants may have afforded for the charge of maintaining the propriety of coercive measures in religion, it appears that, instead of holding any such principle, they were prepared to vindicate the sacred rights of conscience in opposition to intolerance. "I have sometimes thought," says Ebenezer, when referring to the covenants, in a letter addressed to a gentleman, and afterwards published by Mr. Wilson with Mr. Erskine's consent,—“the civil constitution was too much blended with the affairs of Christ's kingdom in their public engagements; as also that the way of forcing people was not the way to make proselytes unto Christ, the weapons of whose kingdom are not carnal but spiritual, suited unto the soul and spirit, where his kingdom is principally established.” To the same purpose we read in the Judicial Testimony enacted by the Associate Presbytery, as has been mentioned, so early as December 1736: *It must be acknowledged that the enforcing of religious duties with civil penalties, and in too many instances blending the affairs of Church and State with*

*one another, is totally inconsistent with the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom."** We shall only add, on this subject, the following quotation from "Answers to Mr. Nairn's Reasons of Dissent" from an act passed by that Presbytery in the year 1742 :—"The public good of outward and common order, in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with magistracy can propose ; in a sole respect unto that office. And as, in prosecuting this end *civilly*, according to their office, it is only over men's good and evil works that they can have any inspection ; so it is only over these which they must needs take cognizance of, for the said public good : While, at the same time, their doing so must be in such a manner, and proceed so far allenarly, as is requisite for that end ; without assuming any lordship immediately over men's consciences, or making any encroachment on the special privileges and business of the church."†

In the year 1745, when a second daring and unnatural REBELLION assaulted the British throne, Mr. Erskine, though now a seceder from the judicatories of the Established Church, discovered the same ardent loyalty and manly intrepidity which he had shown in 1715, when minister of the parish of Portmoak. Attached from principle to the House of Hanover, he strenuously exhorted his hearers and fellow-citizens to co-operate with the loyal part of the nation in resisting the bold attempt of Charles to recover his grandfather's crown. Owing in

* Re-exhibition, p. 90.

† Gibb's Display, vol. i. p. 311.

a great degree to the influence of this popular minister, a regiment of volunteers, consisting of 600 men, was formed of the inhabitants of Stirling, furnished with arms and ammunition from the castle, and determined to hazard their lives in defence of the place. About thirty years ago, a respectable native of Stirling thus related the matter to a friend :

“The zeal and unanimity of the townsmen at that time were wonderful. The old inhabitants still talk of it with peculiar delight. Their religion, their families, their friends, their rights and dearest interests, were in the utmost hazard. These considerations conspired to animate them with the most enthusiastic ardour, and to make them encounter any fatigue and labour with the most indefatigable patience. But what of all circumstances tended in a strong degree to promote their zeal, and encourage them in the defence of the place, was the activity of the magistrates and clergymen, particularly of Provost Christie, and Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, who was animated with the highest attachment to the constitution, and resolutely bent for defence.”*

Roused by the importance of the cause, Mr. Erskine, it is said, even carried arms himself, and was appointed Captain of a band of volunteers. One night, when the rebels were expected to make an attack on the town, he presented himself in the guard-room, fully accoutred in the military garb of the times. Dr. John Anderson, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, and Mr. John Burns, teacher, father of the Rev. Dr. Burns, Barony parish in that city, happened

* Extract of a Letter from a Mr. Hervey to the author of the Portmoak MS. inserted in that manuscript.

to be on guard the same night; and surprised to see the venerable clergyman in this attire, recommended to him to go home to his prayers, as more suitable to his vocation. "I am determined," was his reply, "to take the hazard of the night along with you; for the present crisis requires the *arms* as well as the *prayers* of all good subjects." He remained with them, accordingly, all that night; but no formal attack was then made.*

Some idea of the high estimation in which the loyalty and the influence of Mr. Erskine were held during that critical period, may be formed from the following letters. The first we insert is one he had the honour to receive from WILLIAM, MARQUIS OF LOTHIAN—the same nobleman who, for seven years successively—from 1732 to 1738—held the office of his Majesty's Commissioner to the General Assembly. It is transcribed *verbatim* from the original, which we have had the satisfaction to see.

"London, January 25, 1745–6.

"Rev. Sir,

"Being informed that many of his Majesty's well-affected subjects, (with whom you have great interest) zealous for the defence of our present happy government and invaluable interests, now attacked by France, Spain, the Pope, and a Popish Pretender, have offered to take arms and serve the king, upon condition of being allowed to choose their own officers; I therefore take the liberty to offer my son,

* This anecdote is confirmed by the authority of Dr. Burns, and of another gentleman acquainted with the late Prof. Anderson.

Lord Robert Kerr, who is ambitious to serve as their Colonel, if they do him and my family the honour to prefer him. It would not be decent for me to give his character, but am persuaded he would behave and act so as to gain their good opinion. I beg to obtain your forgiveness for this trouble, and to be esteemed, Sir,

Your most obedient and most humble servant,

LOTHIAN."

"The Duke is soon to be with you, and it will be very proper that you address him; for which end, my son, if you desire, shall attend you."

To this letter Mr. Erskine returned an appropriate and respectful answer, which we copy from his own scroll in short-hand characters, written on the same sheet with that from the Marquis:

"Stirling, Feb. 8, 1746."

"My Lord,

"I had the honour of your Lordship's [letter] of the 25th of January, Sabbath last, when I returned from my exile through the Highland [bands] which had infested this place for about twenty days. Thanks be to God, who made the very name and arms of his Royal Highness, the Duke of Cumberland, such a terror to them, that they left the place with such precipitance, that as they blew up their magazine in the church of St. Ninians, lest it should fall into the hands of our army, so they left a great deal of their baggage for them. I had wrote your Lordship sooner, had it not been for that confusion the place was in for some days, while the Duke and his army were passing.

"In consequence of your Lordship's letter, I did myself the honour of waiting upon your son, Lord Robert, on Monday last, when he was in this place with

the army, and told him of what motion was made to me both by your Lordship and my Lady Marchioness. He told me he had some knowledge of that affair ; but in regard of the sudden flight of the enemy, and that there was now a great probability that the rebellion might be extinguished by the regular troops under the command of his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, he did not think there would be any occasion for the Seceders to regiment themselves at present. However, as I told himself, if there were any occasion for the Seceders to appear in arms in defence of his Majesty's person, and government, and family, and the liberties we enjoy under his protection, I know of none that would be more acceptable to them as a leader or Colonel than Lord Robert, both upon account of his own presumptive merit, of which I had good information from General Blakeney and others, as also on account of that noble family of Lothian he is come of ; which hath both formerly and of late made such appearances for the Protestant interest and our reformation-work in Scotland. And in this your noble family, and we who are Seceders from the established Church do happily agree ; for our secession from the present Judicatories goes purely and only upon this very ground, that we think they have, in many particulars, departed from the covenanted doctrine, discipline, and government of the Reformation Church of Scotland. I am,

My Lord, your Lordship's most humble

and most obedient Servant,

EBENEZER ERSKINE."

Mr. Erskine, it will be observed, alludes to the Marchioness of Lothian as having made the same proposal

to him with her honoured husband. Though we have not been able to find either the original or a copy of the letter he received from her Ladyship, we have been favoured with a sight of a first draught, written by him in common hand, of the answer he returned to the Marchioness ; of which the following is a copy. It is without date, but appears to have been written previous to the Letter he addressed to his Lordship.

“ Madam,

“ I had the honour of your Ladyship’s letter on Saturday last. I am glad the Seceders have hitherto [so] acquitted themselves in behalf of the Protestant cause in opposition to the Rebellion against our sovereign King George, as to deserve so great compliments as your Ladyship is pleased to bestow upon them.

“ As to the motion made by your Ladyship of levying a regiment of militia among the Seceders under the command of your son Lord Robert, I make no doubt but if his standard were set up and intimated to them, they would be so fond of such an honourable leader as to flock to him in great numbers, both from this [part of the] country and elsewhere, providing their service might be accepted upon the following terms, viz.—that they have the choice of their own officers under him ;—that in case a Regiment is made up, they have a Minister of their own choosing, to dispense the ordinances of the Gospel among them ;—that they be provided of arms, money, and ammunition according to act of Parliament, and be dismissed at the end of six months, or when the Rebellion shall be suppressed ;—and that they be excused from the usual oath taken by the military : All which I make no doubt your Ladyship,

with the Marquis and your son, will judge to be just and reasonable.

“If your Ladyship’s motion had been made to me while I was in the free exercise of my ministry in Stirling, and correspondence [was] open with my brethren, I could [have] been much more serviceable to promote the design. But ever since the town of Stirling was surrendered unto the Rebels, I have been in a state of exile, *having narrowly escaped their merciless hands*, being very active in levying some companies in order to defend the town of Stirling against them. However, I shall, through Divine assistance, exert myself so far as my present situation will admit, in carrying on the above design. I am at present on the north side of the Forth near Alloa, and have pitched upon the bearer *Duncan Black*, one of the Seceders in that place, a very active young man, and of an extensive acquaintance with the Seceders both on this and the other side of the river, himself being frank for the service; that he may converse with your Ladyship, the Marquis, and your son, upon this subject, and receive their orders.

“That grace, mercy, and peace, may be multiplied to your Ladyship and the honourable family, shall be the constant prayer of, Madam,

Your Ladyship’s

Most humble and obedient Servant in the Lord.”

“*P. S.*—I apprehend it might contribute much to further the design, if your Ladyship would be pleased to write to the same effect to the seceding Ministers in your country, as also to Mr. Fisher in Glasgow, to be communicated to his brethren of that Presbytery.”

To these interesting documents we may add a letter of thanks for his services, addressed to Mr. Erskine by command of the Duke of Cumberland. It is copied from the original, which, as well as the preceding, was lent us by a friend.

*" To the Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine,
Minister of the Gospel at Stirling.*

Falkirk, Feb. 1, 1745-6.

" Sir,

" His Royal Highness has ordered me to tell you, that he is much obliged to you for your intelligence, and for the zeal you show in his Majesty's service. With regard to the information contained in your letter, our advices since received make it unnecessary to do any thing upon it. But his Royal Highness is not the less sensible of your good intention. I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

H. CONWAY, *Aide-de-Camp to H. R. H."*

Mr. Erskine, in the above letters to the Marquis and Marchioness of Lothian, refers to a temporary exile he was compelled to undergo. The Highland army, consisting of 4000 men, having got possession of the town, though not of the castle of Stirling, he found it expedient to withdraw for a time. Being exceedingly obnoxious to them for the zeal and activity he had discovered in opposing their cause, and determined to avoid every appearance of submission, he resided for several weeks at the distance of a few miles from the place, and preached on Sabbath to his people in the wood of Tillibody; while the friends of the

Pretender, resenting his distinguished loyalty, made use of his capacious church as a magazine for warlike stores.

His discourses at this trying juncture were happily adapted to the existing aspect of providence. He directed the attention of his hearers, for example, to the illustrious character and bloodless conquests of the Prince of peace, in a series of sermons from Rev. vi. 2. "And I saw and behold! a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given to him; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." Nor did he neglect to embrace every proper opportunity, both in the pulpit and elsewhere, of reminding his countrymen, that they ought not to rely on human means of defence, however proper and necessary in their own place, but to repose their confidence in the Lord of hosts. The following anecdote, which is related on good authority, will serve to illustrate his attention to this part of his duty.

About the commencement of the rebellion, he had frequent interviews with that celebrated Christian hero, COLONEL GARDINER. One day the Colonel accompanied Mr. Erskine to a meeting of the gentlemen of the town; and when endeavouring to inspire the company with the same ardour of patriotic heroism which glowed in his own bosom, he proceeded to state the deficiencies of the enemy's force in arms, in numbers, and in military talents; and affirmed that, were he at the head of a certain regiment which he once had the honour to command, he would not be afraid to encounter their whole army. Mr. Erskine standing by him, and marking his expressions, tapped him gently on the shoulder, and thus whispered in his ear, "Colo-

nel, say, *under God*.” That great man, whose piety was equal to his courage, replied, smiling, “O yes, Mr. Erskine, I mean that, and having God for our general, we must be conquerors.”

In concluding our notices of this minister’s laudable conduct in that season of trial, we must not omit to state, that the ardent loyalty displayed by Mr. Erskine and his Associate Congregation, characterized the whole body of the Seceding clergy and their people, without a single exception. “Though the Seceders,” says one of their number, who honourably shared in the perils of the day,* “were spread through all the Lowlands of Scotland, from Dunkeld to Cheviot, and from St. Andrews to Air, and in the counties of Angus, Mearns, Banff, Elgin, Nairn, and Ross; yet not one of them in all Scotland, even in places where the rebels had the greatest power and influence, could ever be got to join, or show any favour to the design of that party.” Their hearts and their hands were universally in favour of the Protestant succession in the House of Hanover. In several districts their loyalty subjected them to a variety of hardships and losses. Not a few of them hazarded their lives, and some of them died, in the cause. All united in public prayer and fasting appointed by the Associate Synod for the suppression of “an unnatural and Antichristian Rebellion;” and at considerable risk in many instances, express supplications were presented in behalf of King George II. and his government.

Scarcely was this rebellion quelled, and internal

* The Rev. ADAM GIBB, Edinburgh. See his *Display of the Secession Testimony*, vol. ii. pp. 248-50.

tranquillity restored to the country, when a most deplorable event occurred in the Secession Church. A difference of sentiment unhappily arose among its ministers with regard to the *religious clause in the BURGESS OATH*, then required in several cities and towns of Scotland; and “so sharp was the contention” which ensued, that in the month of April 1747, an entire separation took place between the opposing parties. It is not our purpose to detail the particulars of this memorable rupture, or to institute any inquiry either respecting the question at issue, or the comparative merits of the parties, with reference to the perspicacity of intellect and the regard to order and justice they respectively discovered. It is proper, however to state, that the minister whose life is now presented to the reader’s attention, was one of them who considered the swearing of the Burgess oath, containing the religious clause in question, as not at all inconsistent with the profession and circumstances of a Seceder, and who consequently urged the exercise of mutual forbearance; and that, amid the grief and vexation which he felt during the agitation of the controversy, and under its bitterest results, he manifested, on the whole, his usual meekness, combined with decision. As an individual, he published nothing on the subject except a short pamphlet, consisting of sixteen pages, and written with admirable temper. The dispassionate manner in which, during the heat of the contest, he here treats the disputed point, does him great credit. That small publication appeared to him sufficient to place the matter in a clear light, and to satisfy the candid inquirer.*

* The title of this pamphlet is “The True State of the Question, on which a Breach followed in the Assoc. Syn. at Edin-”

To be forsaken and disowned by those with whom he had "taken sweet counsel," and who had recognised him as a father and a guide, was no doubt exceedingly distressing to his tender and affectionate heart. Even his son-in-law, the Rev. JAMES SCOTT of Gateshall, decidedly took his ground with those whose views were contrary to his. It could not be without much anguish of spirit that, in a letter before us addressed to his daughter Mrs. Scott, dated "Stirling, May 22, 1750," he expressed himself in the following terms:—
 "I would be glad to see you here, at our sacrament the 2nd Sabbath and 11th day of June; and I am sorry I cannot invite your husband to come along with you.
 - - - I have had many an anxious thought about your difficult situation, but rejoice to hear of your decent and Christian behaviour therein. The Lord knows how and when to deliver you."

burgh 9th April, 1747." Those who wish to know the particulars of this unhappy controversy, may consult on the one side the various pamphlets referred to in the Re-exhibition, p. 263; and on the other, Mr. Gibb's Display, vol. ii. pp. 13-111; and Struthers' History of Scotland, vol. ii. pp. 549-564. Though we have often referred with approbation to this last work, and though the ability and research which the writer has generally discovered, command our sincere esteem, we cannot acquit him of mistake and partiality, however unintentional, on the subject now alluded to, as well as on some later differences which have occurred among Seceders. It is only the love of peace, and an extreme unwillingness to do any thing that could possibly tend to rekindle the expiring embers of strife, that prevents us from expressly correcting a number of statements made by that respectable author on the Breach 1747; which, in our apprehension, (while we lay no claim to absolute exemption from prejudice and prepossession,) exhibit a remarkable instance of special pleading.

Some time after the breach, he received a letter from the Rev. Mr. BISSET of Aberdeen, sympathizing, in the kindest manner, with him and his brother Ralph on this trying occasion; and intimating, that, if they would return to their old terms of church-fellowship, (meaning, we suppose, if they would cease to require the swearing of the Bond,) he and several other clergymen in the north would join them. But something higher than the solacement of human friendship was necessary to assuage his grief. His eyes were directed to the God of Zion, and the Prince of peace;—"to the nail fastened in a sure place, on whom hangs all the glory of his Father's house." Here, as formerly, when injuriously expelled from the communion of the National Church, he once more found sweet consolation. "Here is comfort," he had said, "in case of rents, divisions, and manifold disorders in the visible church, as there is at this day. . . . Here is comfort, that the great Manager of the house is looking on; he permits and over-rules all these confusions and disorders for his own holy and wise ends, for the trial of faith and patience, and to show his own skill in bringing order out of confusion; and when he has performed his whole work in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he will reign among his ancients gloriously."*

That there was much to blame at this mournful division, in the spirit and conduct of the Ministers of the Secession, on both sides, may be readily admitted. Never, perhaps, was the truth of Father Paul's remark more strikingly verified: "In verbal contentions, the smallness of the difference often nourishes the obstinacy

* Works, vol. ii. p. 349.

of the parties.”* That “the way of man is not in himself” has seldom been more impressively demonstrated in fact, than when the same enlightened and excellent men, who, by the Divine aid, had conducted themselves, with great propriety and dignity, in those appearances before the Established Judicatories, which terminated in their secession, now, when left to their own humours, contended with each other in a very culpable and indecorous manner. The breach, with its attendant circumstances and immediate fruits, was highly prejudicial to the cause of the Secession, and to the general interests of religion. Yet “the only wise God,” who, in his adorable Providence, brings good out of evil, did, in all probability, over-rule it for the more extensive diffusion of the Gospel. In the course of a few years, the number of the Seceding Ministers and congregations was more than doubled; and the vigilance with which the two Synods, claiming each the name and the powers of “the Associate Synod,” watched each other’s movements, may have contributed to the preservation of the truth. The Ministers of both Synods, at any rate, continued universally to preach the Gospel, and to administer the ordinances of Christ in purity; and after the separation had lasted more than seventy years, it pleased God to pour out the Spirit of love and peace on the ministers and members of the two great branches of the Secession, and to accomplish the RE-UNION consummated under favourable auspices on the 8th September 1820, in Bristo Street Meeting-house, Edinburgh,—the very spot where they had formerly parted. May this Re-union, which has now sub-

* Quoted in Milner’s Church History, vol. v. p. 519.

sisted for the space of ten years, be increasingly consolidated by the Divine favour and blessing, and prove a step towards the acceleration of that wished-for period, when every cause of division in the church shall cease, when the truth and peace shall be ardently and universally loved, and all Christians shall delight to dwell together in unity, “that with one mind and one mouth they may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

For a few years subsequently to the breach, Mr. Erskine continued not only to prosecute the labours of the ministry at Stirling, but to discharge other ecclesiastical duties which devolved on him. He took his share, for example, in the Critical Exercises for mutual improvement, assigned to the members of his Presbytery. The following Memorandum, accordingly, appears in one of his Note-books, at the head of an “Exercise and Addition” on Jude 1.:—“The Associate Presbytery of Glasgow having appointed a Presbyterial exercise upon the Epistle of Jude,—I, as the oldest, had the 1st verse appointed me,—to be delivered at their next meeting, April 1750, in Stirling.”

He had been honoured previously, however, with a Synodical appointment, of far greater weight. The Rev. Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, who succeeded Mr. Wilson of Perth as Professor of Divinity, being one of those Brethren who utterly condemned the disputed clause in the Burgess Oath, as inconsistent with the character and circumstances of Seceders, the Synod to which Mr. Erskine belonged, in the first instance, fixed their choice on him as Teacher of the Candidates for the Christian ministry under their inspection. From

a manuscript written by Mr. James Erskine, we learn, that, after having attended more than one session at Abernethy, he entered his Uncle's Divinity class at Stirling in December 1748. The late Rev. William M'Ewen of Dundee, and John Brown of Haddington, commenced their theological studies under the same venerable man. Mr. Brown retained a favourable impression of his appearances in the chair, and was wont to say, that he gave them not only instructive lectures, but many serious and affecting advices. But however well qualified he was in other respects for this momentous charge, bodily infirmities induced him to resign it so early as some time in 1749; for in that year we find Mr. Fisher, his successor, was invested with the office.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Erskine visited with new bereavements—His infirmities—Obtains Mr. James Erskine for his assistant and successor—Exemplary conduct, and striking expressions, in the near prospect of eternity—Death and burial—Sketch of his character, with anecdotes—Excellencies as a Preacher and an Author—Notices of his family and descendants—Conclusion.

THE shadows of the evening are not more grateful to the labourer who has borne the burden and heat of the day, nor the first appearances of the longed for haven to the mariner who has undergone the hazards of a tedious and tempestuous voyage, than are the approaches of death to the conscientious Christian, after the toils and perils of an active and eventful life. Even at an early period of his ministry at Portmoak, the subject of these memoirs, as has been stated, was led, by personal and domestic afflictions, to anticipate, with holy solicitude and joyful hope, a speedy dismissal from the region of conflict, temptation, and sorrow, to the land of eternal rest. For singularly important and interesting purposes, of which, at that time, he could not entertain the most distant conception, his life was prolonged far beyond his expectations. But shortly after the occurrences narrated at the close of the pre-

ceding chapter, the renewed breaches which took place in the circle of his family and relatives, with the commencing infirmities of age, served powerfully to direct his thoughts and desires to a blessed immortality.

On the 15th March 1751, he lost his second wife; and his brother Ralph died on the 6th November 1752. When the interesting intelligence of his dear brother's decease was communicated to him, he said with great emotion, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory." Amid all his bereavements and afflictions, he made Jehovah his confidence and hope. "Many of God's billows are going over me," says he in a letter to a friend, "yet still I hope the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and his song shall be with me in the night."

For a long series of years posterior to the threatening ailments he last suffered at Portmoak, he was blessed with excellent health, and enabled to acquit himself of his various obligations, both at home and abroad, with much activity. But when he approached the age of three score years and ten, he had repeated attacks of trouble, and his bodily vigour gradually failed. In a letter addressed to his daughter, Mrs. Scott, dated "Stirling, May 22, 1750," he says,—

"My dear Alice,

"This acquaints you that I have had this winter several severe fits of the colic. But I bless the Lord, who has hitherto helped me, when brought low. I am at present in tolerable health; though infirmities increase with age, being this day within a month of seventy years."

His daughter Anne, Mrs. Jaffray, writes a postscript to the same letter, in which, after giving her sister an account of the spiritual comfort she had enjoyed in hearing the Gospel, and partaking of the Lord's Supper at Falkirk, from which she had just returned; she adds, "My father was not there; he does not agree with travelling."

Having become incapable of preaching regularly every Sabbath, his place was occasionally supplied by his Brethren, and by probationers. His people cheerfully consented to make adequate provision for an assistant; and, in consequence, Mr. JAMES ERSKINE, his nephew, and third son of his brother Ralph, being regularly called, was ordained his colleague and successor on the 22d January 1752. One of the sermons of that day was preached by EBENEZER himself, from 2 Cor. iv. 7. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* An attentive reader of that discourse will see reason to conclude, that, under whatever corporeal infirmities he then laboured, his mental vigour was in no degree impaired.

Mr. James Erskine proved an eminent blessing to his uncle, and to the congregation. "As a son with the father, he served with him in the Gospel." But notwithstanding this alleviation of his labours, the frailties of the aged minister continued and increased; and the day of his death was obviously approaching. The following sentences, accordingly, occur in a letter from his colleague to Mrs. Scott, bearing date "Stirling, Oct. 10, 1753:"—"Your father still remains incapable

* Works, vol. ii. pp. 675-696.

of preaching, through his bodily indisposition. Although the wound he got when he was cut of the *fistula* be quite filled up and covered with skin, yet a most uneasy pain still remains, which occasions a vast deal of trouble to him, and has made him sometimes apprehensive of the *fistula's* recurring. What may be the event of his trouble the Lord only knows." She had afterwards a letter from her sister Mrs. Jaffray, dated the 23d April 1754, which contains the following expressions:—"My father is no better, and I am afraid never will; he complains that he is always weaker."

The truth is, that, owing to the imperfect state of medical science at that time, a painful operation to which he submitted gave but partial and temporary relief.* It was his happiness, however, to experience the most tender sympathy from his daughters, his colleague and other relatives, from an affectionate congregation, and a wide circle of friends. What was incomparably better, he enjoyed the reviving presence of the God of Jacob. Under acute pain and protracted debility, he exemplified the power of that living faith which he had often inculcated on others, and exhibited a noble pattern of devout resignation. Some time after his affliction had almost constantly confined him to bed, his people expressed an earnest desire to see and hear him once more; and in compliance with their solicitations, he went from his bed to the pulpit, and delivered a short discourse from these cheering words, Job xix. 25. "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

His last Note-book contains the following Memorandum

* This account was given to the writer by the late Mr. Ebenezer Scott, surgeon, Dalkeith, Mr. Erskine's grandson.

dum: "Stirling, Sabbath, Nov. 12, 1752,—My dear brother Ralph having died the 16th, and been buried the 19th [October,] I incline to preach on the text following, Job xix. 25." Then follows a sermon on that text,—the last, perhaps, that he ever fully composed; for it is succeeded by some blank leaves, and then by several sermons written by his son-in-law Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Erskine himself relates the circumstances under which he now preached from these words, in a letter addressed to Mrs. Scott, which discovers full tranquillity of mind, and breathes a submissive, grateful, and affectionate spirit. It is as follows:

Stirling, ———, 1753.

"My dear Alice,

"My nephew James read me your letter to him yesterday, which brought me under a new sympathy with you, on account of the death of your dear uncle Ralph, and the staggering condition of your father. According to the course of nature, it was my turn to have gone off before him. But the will of the good and sovereign God has determined otherwise, and that I should tarry behind for a while in this weary wilderness. It seems I am not yet made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, but need to be more beaten in the wilderness with the hammer of affliction, before I come to the upper temple and sanctuary. But good is the will of the Lord.

"As for the state of my health, about which you are so anxious, I bless the Lord I have no formed sickness; only I have borne, and am still so much afflicted with pain, that I am unable to follow the work of the ministry. I am mostly confined to my bed. I sometimes get up, but in a little I am forced to return to my bed

again through pain, which abates as to the severity of it whenever I get to bed, in so much that my tottering hand becomes steady, and both body and mind are more easy. This letter is a proof of what I say, for it is wrote in bed—leaning on my elbow. I could neither have written so much, nor so well, had I been sitting at the table. The Lord makes me to sing of mercy on this account, that my bed is made to ease me, and my couch to comfort me ; nor am I, like poor Job, scared with dreams, or terrified with visions. Many a time my meditations of Him are sweet in the silent watches of the night. Many, many a time, the Lord says, ‘I am the Lord thy God ;’ and then follows, ‘O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God.’ ‘Thine am I, O David, and on thy side will I be, thou son of Jesse.’

“On Sabbath last, in the afternoon, as the people were very urgent to see and hear me, I went from my bed to the pulpit ; and after preaching half an hour from these words, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth,’ I returned from the pulpit to my bed again.—I begin to weary on my elbow.

Your very affectionate Father,

E. ERSKINE.”

His last sermon was literally preached from his bed to a company assembled in his room, where he baptised a child, after discoursing on a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, viz. Psalm *xlvi.* 14. “This God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide even unto death.”

His private conversation with relatives and other kind inquirers, during his last illness, was at once cheer-

ful and edifying. He often expressed himself in language to this effect. "I have always found my times of severe affliction my best times. Many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them—a good God, a good conscience, a good cause." When one of his elders thus accosted him: "Sir, you have given us many good advices; may I ask what you are now doing with your own soul?" "I am just doing with it," he replied, "what I did forty years ago; I am resting on that word, 'I am the Lord thy God.'" Another friend, surprised at the serenity and cheerfulness he possessed in the immediate view of death and eternity, put the question; "Sir, are you not afraid of your sins!" "Indeed no," was his answer; "ever since I knew Christ, I have never thought highly of my frames and duties, nor am I *slavishly* afraid of my sins."

To several friends who were conversing with him one afternoon, he expressed his assurance of future bliss in the following memorable words; "O, Sirs, my body is now become a very disagreeable habitation for my soul; but when my soul goes out of my body, it will as naturally fly into the bosom of Jesus, as a stone will fall to the centre."* Or, as others relate the anecdote, he said, what is entirely to the same effect, and what probably he also uttered, either then or about the same time; "I know that when my soul forsakes this tabernacle of clay, it will fly as naturally to my Saviour's bosom, as the bird to its beloved nest."† To a relative he one day said, "While age and infirmities are increasing, I desire to wait all the days of my appointed time till my change come, looking out for the ever-

* Gospel-Truth, p. 61.

† Portmoak MS.

lasting day of the immediate enjoyment of the Lord, when sighing and sinning shall have an everlasting end." To another of his relations who came to see him, and began to comfort him thus, "I hope you get now and then a *blink* to bear up your spirit under your affliction,—he promptly returned this spirited reply, "I know more of *words* than of *blinks*. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. The covenant is my charter ; and if it had not been for that blessed word, my hope and strength had perished from the Lord." To his beloved children he unbosomed himself in the most endearing manner, mingling consolation with his dying counsels : "Though I die, the Lord liveth. I have known more of God since I came to this bed, than through all my life."

During the night on which he finished his earthly career, Mrs. Fisher, having come from Glasgow to visit her dying father, was sitting in the apartment where he lay, and engaged in reading. Awakening from a slumber, he said, "What book is that, my dear, you are reading?" "It is your sermon, father," she replied, "on that text, 'I am the Lord thy God.'" "O woman," said he then, "that is the best sermon ever I preached." The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as well as to many of his hearers. A few minutes after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his daughter to bring the table and candle near the bed ; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, *he quietly breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer*, on the 2d of June, 1754. Had he lived twenty days longer, he would have finished the seventy-fourth year of his age ; and had he been spared three months more, he would have

completed the fifty-first of his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmoak, and nearly twenty-three at Stirling.

The following extract from a letter, the original of which we very lately received, goes to confirm the above statements respecting the tranquil, and even triumphant manner of his death. It is addressed to Mrs. Scott, by Mr. James Wardlaw, a very worthy gentleman at Dunfermline, who had married one of his daughters.

“ Dear Sister,

“ Having opportunity of this bearer, I thought I might write to you, that I saw your dear father about eight days before he died. He had the full exercise of his reason and judgment, and said to me he was going to death, and through it, with that promise in his hand, ‘I am the Lord thy God.’ He added, that the Lord had said that to him, and made his soul to answer and call him ‘My Lord and my God.’ And after a little respite from the sickness he was then distressed with, he added that he *rejoiced in hope of the glory of God*. I was, you may be sure, much comforted to hear him, and so was every one that had the happiness of seeing him upon his death-bed, especially for twenty days before his death. He retained his judgment to the last, and spoke till within fifteen minutes of his death. . . . My wife joins in her compliments to you and Mr. Scott. And I am,

Dear Sister,

Your affectionate brother,

JA. WARDLAW.”

Dunfermline, 24th June, 1754.

In conformity with his own request, he was interred at the centre of his meeting-house, in a spot opposite to the pulpit, where a large stone covered his grave. A Latin inscription on the stone simply states the time of his decease, the duration of his ministry, his pastoral fidelity, and his having expressed a wish that his mortal remains should be deposited in the church, in order that, being dead, he might still confirm the doctrine, which, during his life, he had zealously maintained. It is as follows :

2 Junii 1754, ætat 74, Dormiit in Jesu,
Reverendus Dominus EBENEZER ERSKINE,
Officio pastorali, primo apud Portmoacenses 28,
dein apud Stirlinenses 23, fidelissimè functus,
In æde hoc sepeliri voluit,
ut, mortuus, testimonium firmaret,
quod, dum vivus, mordicus tenuit.

The original place of worship, however, built in the year 1740, having been lately demolished, and a new and elegant church erected a little backwards from its site, which was opened in spring 1826, Mr. Erskine's tomb, in consequence, has undergone a change in its relative position. It is now situated in the area at the front of the church, at some distance from the wall. The people, it is said, intend to express their affectionate veneration for his memory by erecting a new and handsome monument on the spot. His important services to the cause of truth and liberty, justly entitle him to the lasting gratitude and esteem, not merely of his own congregation, but of the whole Secession Church, and of his countrymen at large.

The accounts already given of his life, ministry, and

death, might seem to supersede any further delineation of his CHARACTER. It may be proper, however, to exhibit in one view, some of its more prominent traits, interspersing a few facts and anecdotes, not yet related.

His *piety* was at once evangelical, sincere, and fervent. We have seen the mighty change of inward sentiment and feeling he experienced a few years after his ordination to the sacred office, with its salutary and permanent fruits in his conduct. We have seen with what solemnity he dedicated himself to God, and with what fidelity he endeavoured to perform his resolutions and vows. We have seen the cheerful and persevering diligence he discovered in improving both public and private means of spiritual advancement, and in closely communing with God, and with his own heart. The necessity of vital religion to the comfort and usefulness of a Christian Minister, was strongly impressed on his mind; and he appears to have maintained a habitual jealousy over himself, lest official duty should by any means jostle out personal devotion,—lest while assiduously engaged in distributing spiritual provision to others, he should forget to bring it home for the nourishment of his own soul. “The ministers of the Gospel,” he observes, “when dispensing the truths of God, must preach home to their own souls as well as to others; and truly it can never be expected that we should apply the truth with any warmth or liveliness to others, unless we make a warm application thereof to our own souls. And if we do not feed upon these doctrines, and practise the duties which we deliver to you, though we preach to others, we ourselves are but cast-aways.”

The spirituality of his mind was manifest to all with

whom he conversed. At one time, when his Brethren were talking in his presence about the peculiarities of the Newtonian system—the vast number and amazing revolutions of the stars, his thoughts taking a still higher flight, he thus expressed himself, “I’ll see all these on my way to glory.” When he happened, in the course of his walks, to fall in with any of his hearers pursuing their usual employment, he was accustomed to propose some spiritual question for their solution. Even trivial incidents were improved for the purpose of moral and religious instruction. At one time, for example, when passing over a hill in the parish of Portmoak, a lark, pursued by a hawk, took refuge in his bosom; he kindly lodged the little refugee, till, having reached a great distance from its persecutor, he gave it liberty to soar and sing in safety; and this small circumstance suggested to his mind a train of happy thoughts, which he brought forward in a discourse from Psalm xxxiv. 22. “The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”*

Nothing is more offensive to a pious ear than the gross profanation of the name of God. The following anecdote discovers the horror which it excited in the breast of this good man, with his anxiety to check it, and, at the same time, illustrates the power of conscience over the most daring transgressors. When crossing the Forth from Leith to Kinghorn, he had the unhappiness to find himself in the midst of ungodly passengers, who took the most unhallowed liberties with their Creator’s name. For a time he was silent, but at last, unable to suppress his concern, and solicitous to curb

* Portmoak MS.

their blaspheming tongues, he rose from his seat, and taking hold of the mast, uncovered his head, waved his hat, and cried aloud, "O yes! O yes! O yes!" Having thus secured the attention of the astonished passengers and crew, he proceeded, in a solemn and impressive manner to proclaim that commandment of the moral law which they were flagrantly violating: "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*" Without adding a single word, he quit-
ted the mast, covered his head, and resumed his seat.* The giddy company, however, resolved to harden themselves against this striking reproof. They began first to elbow each other, then to titter, and at last, to be avenged on their kind reprover, they burst into a fit of loud laughter. Their conversation soon became as profane and offensive as before. Among the rest, a lady, laying aside the delicacy of the sex, and regardless alike of the authority of God and the maxims of politeness, seemed to find a malicious pleasure in giving emphasis to almost every sentence, by intermixing the sacred name, accompanied with smiles of derision and contempt, obviously intended to mortify the venerable man. It pleased God, however, to second the despised warning of his servant, by an alarming admonition of his providence. When they had got to the north of Inch-Keith, a tempest suddenly arose; the heavens became black with clouds; the sea raged; the danger was imminent; the pilot, unable to keep hold of the helm, assured them that their fate was inevitable. This unexpected alteration

* Compare the extract from his Diary, dated "Monday, Jan. 29, 1712,"—quoted, pp. 183-4.

of circumstances produced at least a temporary change on their spirit and appearance. Their sportive gaiety gave place to consternation and despair. The same lady who had acted so insolent a part towards the faithful clergyman, overwhelmed with dismay, now sprang across the boat, and clasped her arms around his neck, exclaiming, "O Sir, if I die here, I will die with you." Through the Divine patience and forbearance, however, they weathered the storm, and reached the harbour in safety.

His *natural affection*, constitutionally strong and tender, was ennobled and refined by the operation of religious principle. We have seen the alacrity and frequency with which he called on his family to unite with him in acts of worship; the fervent prayers he poured forth for "the mother and the children;" and the tender solicitude he felt when affliction and death approached his abode. As a father, he blended condescension and kindness with parental authority. It was his care not only to instruct his children in the first principles of religion, but affectionately to point out its necessity and utility, and to inculcate an early acceptance of that Saviour who was infinitely precious to himself. For this purpose, when they were advancing to maturity, he was accustomed, according to the statement of his daughter, Mrs. Scott, to disclose the secrets of his heart, and to favour them occasionally with notices of his own religious experience. Nor did he omit those minute attentions to their external comfort, which exceedingly endear a father to his offspring, and increase his beneficial influence a thousand-fold. The boards of his Note-books for the pulpit bear testimony to this

trait of his character ; for some of them are full of memoranda respecting various useful and gratifying articles which he intended to procure for them when he made visits to Kirkaldy and Edinburgh. Never does a great man appear to higher advantage, than at the moment of his descending, under the impulse of noble principles, to those small expressions of kindness which the circumstances of infancy and childhood require. Who would not admire the amiable PHILIP MELANTHON, when rocking the cradle of his child, and vindicating himself to a learned associate who happened to find him thus engaged, and twitted him for performing a service unworthy of his dignity,—by reminding him that little children are *the charge of angels*.

Mr. Erskine's domestic servants, also, whether young or adult, were the objects of his fatherly regard. He cheerfully allowed them their full share, both of temporal and spiritual advantages ; they were expressly included in his daily prayers, and in his repeated dedications of himself and his household to God. When labourers were occasionally employed in his service, too, he pleasantly directed their attention to important lessons suggested by the work which occupied their hands.

His Christian benevolence was not confined within the narrow circle of his own family and relatives. It took a wider range, and extended its generous efforts to every individual of his people, to all the churches, to all mankind. What a high value he put on the souls of men, and how desirous he was to become instrumental in promoting their salvation, is clear from the whole

tenor of his ministry. The enlightened views he attained of evangelical truth, and the lively interest he took in the spiritual welfare of others, rendered him singularly useful, as well in private conference as in public ministrations, to those who laboured under distress and perplexity respecting the most momentous of all concerns. Nor did he overlook the temporal necessities of men, as the following quotation, relating to his exemplary conduct at Portmoak, will serve to evince :

“ It is established by a variety of evidence, that Mr. Erskine had a noble generosity of soul, so that when applied to for assistance, his heart and hand went as far as his ability and circumstances would admit. At all times his advice and aid might be confidently relied upon, in every scheme which had the comfort of mankind for its object. Hence he was frequently calling upon his people to contribute with him for the relief of the indigent scholar, the forlorn captive, and the good man reduced by unavoidable misfortune. He paid much attention to the parochial funds, which increased to a great sum under his ministry. This accumulation arose, not from withholding from the poor more than was meet ; for their allowance, considering the reduced value of money, was very considerable. But he was enabled to be very liberal to the poor and needy, and, at the same time, to enrich their funds ; not merely by that spirit of philanthropy and charity that he infused into his own people, by precept and example, but by resources which flowed to the funds of the parish, from the great confluence of people who came from distant places, drawn by their high esteem of Mr. Erskine, to attend when the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was

dispensed. During his incumbency, the collections on these occasions gradually rose.* The munificence of Mr. Erskine's temper would not permit him to retain those collections, without communicating of the abundance brought to the parish, to those who were in destitute circumstances, at a distance. Sometimes not less than one-fourth of the whole was distributed to the pious poor and afflicted [belonging to other parishes,] who were recommended to the Session as entitled to relief."†

No feature of his character was more distinctly marked than his *public spirit*—his ardour in the cause of religion and religious liberty, and noble magnanimity in its behalf. His was a zeal that burned with a pure and steady flame. A well-merited encomium was passed on him by his beloved coadjutor Mr. Wilson of Perth, when, in a moment of innocent pleasantry, comparing the four Brethren to the "four living creatures" in the Prophet's vision; he thus began the comparison, "Our Brother Mr. Erskine has the face of a man"‡—evidently meaning that he was characterized by manly intelligence, energy, and fortitude.

Nor is there cause to question that his zeal was happily tempered with *candour* and *true moderation*. While he deemed it necessary to testify, in his discourses, against prevailing errors and corruptions, he gladly took notice of whatever seemed auspicious in the signs of the times. Though unable to shut his eyes against dark and portentous appearances, he was too candid to

* Compare p. 202.

† Portmoak MS.

‡ Ferrier's Mem. of the Rev. W. Wilson, p. 357.

overlook the bright spots in the horizon. In one of his published sermons, for instance, after enumerating the defections of the day, he proceeds with manifest delight to detail a variety of circumstances, calculated to encourage the friends of Zion, to excite their gratitude, and strengthen their faith.* His remarks on public evils were almost always concisely and temperately expressed. Even the sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, so loudly decried by the leading clergy of the age, and followed by such important results, discovers an uncommon degree of caution and discretion, mingled with fidelity. It has been justly observed, that the reader will find it “a faithful evangelical sermon, free from all heat and virulence, breathing much of the spirit of Christian love, and manifesting the most temperate zeal for the Redeemer’s glory, and for the good of souls.”† In the different questions, too, that were discussed by the Associate Presbytery and Synod, he uniformly showed a forbearing and conciliatory spirit, and a decided aversion to measures unnecessarily strong and severe. Here let one example suffice. The Associated Brethren, soon after their separation from the Established Church, were led to examine the propriety of holding public fasts on the days appointed by the civil authorities. Owing to an extreme scrupulosity regarding Christ’s exclusive sovereignty as the Head of the Church, after repeated and keen discussion in the Presbytery, it was

* See his sermon on Is. lix. 10. “When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”—Works, vol. i. p. 554.

† See Ferrier’s Memoir of Mr. Wilson, pp. 203-6. where the author well illustrates the spirit and tenor of that discourse.

decided by the majority of a single vote, that the power of appointing the times, and specifying the causes of fasting, belongs exclusively to the Church Courts; and that, under the circumstances in which the nation and the Church were then placed, it was unlawful to observe the fasts appointed by Government, or even to observe, on the same days, fasts of their own appointment. Messrs. Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, however, concurred in firmly opposing this measure, as unwarrantably rigid; and were prevented from carrying their opposition to the utmost, only by their pacific disposition, and their fear of injuring the great cause in which themselves and the strenuous supporters of that decision had jointly embarked.*—Mr. Whitefield has the following expression in a letter addressed to Mr. David Erskine, one of Ebenezer's sons: "I wish all [the ministers of the Associate Presbytery] were like-minded with your honoured father and uncle; matters then would not be carried on with so high an hand."†

The subject of this memoir, in his general deportment, joined to the gravity and dignity becoming his office, a most engaging *courteousness and affability*. Far from injuring the credit of religion by a sullen reserve, a monastic austerity, or a repulsive moroseness, he wore a cheerful aspect, mingled prudently with those around him, was discreetly obliging to all men, and never apt to frown on any recreation that he considered rational and innocent. He was a lover of music, and

* Brown's Hist. of the Secession, p. 50. 8th ed. Hist. Acc. of the Secession in Christ. Repos. vol. iv. pp. 525-7.

† Coll. of Mr. Whitefield's Letters, No. 425.

though probably no performer, occasionally amused himself by hearing a tune on the violin.* After his translation to Stirling, for the sake of his health, he sometimes took part in a game at the bowling-green. On one of those occasions, falling in with a military officer, who began to swear, he administered a gentle reproof. The officer resenting it as an insult, was violently enraged, and instantly drew his sword. But a magistrate, who happened to be present, coolly told him, that the gentleman who had checked him for swearing was a clergyman, and had only discharged his official duty; and that he must either beg Mr. Erskine's pardon, or go directly to prison. The officer's passion immediately subsided, and, sheathing his sword, he requested the minister's forgiveness.

Whilst the correctness of his morals as a Christian was above suspicion, his *loyalty* as a citizen was incontestably established. His open appearances and uncompromising efforts in the cause of truth, exposed him, it is true, to the most violent obloquy from those whose ecclesiastical policy he judged it necessary to condemn and resist. His adversaries stigmatised him as a notorious troubler, both of church and state, and struggled hard to prove him guilty of sedition, if not of treason. In common with the rest of the eight Brethren who seceded from the Judicatories of the Church of Scotland, he was involved in a heavy and ill-founded accusation, by the act of Assembly 1739; where it is affirmed, that, by the paper they had read in the presence of the Assembly, they had taken upon them to speak "in most in-

* Portmoak MS.

jurious, disrespectful, and insolent terms, concerning the highest civil authority." The Associate Presbytery, in their observations on that act, very properly stated, that, in this "general charge, nothing else can be meant than the testimony, that the Presbytery judged it their duty to give against the encroachment made upon the rights and privileges of the spiritual kingdom of the Lord Jesus, in the late act of Parliament anent *Captain John Porteous*, which was read in one shape or other by most part of the ministers of this Church; and the sinfulness of which was never testified against by any of the present judicatures."*

To insist no further, on this sweeping charge, against all the seceding Brethren, founded merely on their faithful allusion to that extraordinary transaction, let it suffice to notice the personal thrusts aimed at Mr. Erskine. A pamphlet was written by a Mr. *Potter*, minister of Kippen, in which it is gravely alleged, that he was hired by the Pope of Rome, as one of his agents, to rend the Church of Scotland. When he preached at Edinburgh, in November 1735, from Amos ix. 11. "In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David," &c.; his sermons were calumniated as libels on the Government; and several sentences ascribed to him, but falsely or defectively stated, were transmitted by men in power to London, for the consideration of his Majesty's ministers. Similar treatment befel him, also, on a subsequent occasion, when, on the 18th October 1737, he delivered a discourse before the Associate Presby-

* Re-exhibition, pp. 223-3. The reader will find a circumstantial account of Cap. Porteous's interesting affair, with the proceedings to which it gave rise, in Struth. Hist. of Scotland, vol. ii. pp. 29-39.

tery at Perth, from Psalm ii. 6. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." The Synod of Perth and Stirling happening to meet there at the same time, several ministers of that Synod placed themselves amongst his hearers, and, displeased at his bold remonstrances against the defections of the times, thought proper, afterwards, to accuse him of disloyalty, and to take steps towards commencing a legal prosecution. To this he alludes in a note at the beginning of the first of his printed sermons on that text, where he assigns "the clamours of enemies" as one cause of their publication.* The discourses preached at Edinburgh, on Amos ix. 11., were published for a similar reason; and in a preface to the first edition, he vindicates his loyalty against unjust reproach, in the following terms:

"As my conscience bears me witness, so I want not abundance of witnesses, among my ordinary hearers, that I am none of those who despise dominions, or speak evil of dignities, as some would represent me. According to the Divine command, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. I pray for the king, and for all in authority. I teach my people to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's; and in so far as the laws of men are agreeable to the will of the Supreme Lawgiver of men and angels, I exhort my hearers to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates as the ordinance of God, and that not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. I could, beside all this, perhaps, produce as good evidences of loyalty to his present Majesty [George II.,] and firm attachment to the Protestant line, in opposition to a Popish Pre-

* Works, vol. ii. p. 189.

tender, as any who discover their inclination to impeach me of disloyalty and disaffection. But I abstain from this confidence of boasting."

Such was the Christian meekness and gentleness, combined with unshaken resolution and fortitude, with which he sustained the foul imputations of his enemies. He was never actually summoned, so far as we know, to appear before any civil magistrate or court, as a person suspected of disloyalty. Every attempt to convict him of any word or deed unbecoming a dutiful subject, or a peaceable member of society, proved abortive; and the sharpest arrows of calumny were effectually repelled.

All the other excellencies of this distinguished man were crowned by that amiable grace, unfeigned *humility*. The true doctrine of the cross, to which he was so cordially attached, and of which he approved himself so determined an advocate, exerted its native influence in casting down every high imagination; and in disposing him both to walk humbly with God, and to exercise a condescending, mild, and forbearing temper towards men. He made no high pretensions, or ambitious claims. In some instances, indeed, he had the courage to check odious appearances of presumption and arrogance in others, by seasonable and scriptural reproof. Yet self-diffidence and modesty adorned his behaviour. The honour and respect shown him by ministers and people came unsolicited, and often unlooked for. Whatever deference might have been due to him as the eldest of the four Brethren in years and in office, as the standard-bearer among them, as a man of eminent gifts,

acquirements, experience, and popularity, he was much more inclined to recognise the claims of others than to urge or magnify his own. Most cheerfully did he concur in those arrangements of the Associate Presbytery, by which the honours connected with the Professorship of Theology, in the Secession Church, were allotted, first, to the learned and indefatigable Mr. Wilson of Perth, and, after his decease, to the lively and zealous Mr. Moncrieff of Abernethy. In consequence of the unhappy breach 1747, he undertook, in compliance with the wishes of his friends, to discharge this highly responsible office for a time; but no sooner did he find his bodily vigour unequal to that close attention to its duties, which he considered indispensable, than he immediately resigned it. So humble was the opinion he entertained of his own ability, that he even sometimes felt ashamed to succeed his Brethren in the pulpit. Whatever good his ministrations might be the means of effecting, he earnestly exhorted his hearers to look beyond the feeble instrument, and to ascribe the glory to the Saviour. A lady, we are told, who was present at the administration of the Lord's Supper, in a place where he was assisting, was greatly impressed by his discourse. Having learned who he was, she travelled, the following Sabbath, to his own place of worship, to hear him, but was much disappointed in feeling none of those lively impressions of the truth she had experienced on the former occasion. Wondering at the difference, she called for Mr. Erskine, and having plainly stated the circumstances, asked him to what he thought it might be owing. "Madam," he replied, "the reason is this, last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus

Christ, but to-day you have come to hear poor Ebenezer Erskine."

The firmness with which he long resisted the attempts that were made to remove him from the obscure parish of Portmoak to a higher and more comfortable sphere, supplies a satisfactory instance both of his spirituality and humility of mind. The speech he delivered at the meeting of Presbytery at which his call to Kinross was considered, is very expressive of an humble and unassuming spirit. In addition to the sentences formerly cited,* he made the following remarks on that paragraph in the reasons for translation, which immediately related to himself: "As to the favourable character they are pleased to give me, upon which their third Reason is entirely founded, I hope by this time of day I have learned neither to be lifted up with the applauses, nor to be much cast down with the reproaches of men, seeing 'He that judgeth me is the Lord.' Only I am conscious their character is so remote from the truth, that I blush it should have been read before you. The best that I can make of it is, that it is an error of excessive charity towards me, which will not bear the inference they draw from it. I am persuaded that whatever small talents the great Master has bestowed on me, they are more calculated for the parish of Portmoak than any congregation I know in this church." Nothing but a conscientious regard to the voice of providence induced him, ultimately, to leave a people to whom he felt so warmly attached, and to encounter the difficulties of a new and extensive charge.

His humility appeared, further, in a readiness to re-

* Pages 327-8.

tract any rash expression that had escaped him, and to change his sentiments when sufficient evidence was presented of his having entertained a misapprehension. His conduct on various occasions afforded satisfactory proof that he uttered no vain boast, when he said, "I am so far from pretending to infallibility, that I hope I shall never be ashamed publicly to retract what upon conviction shall be found to be amiss."*

The modest estimate he formed of his own gifts and attainments is manifest, in fine, from his candid acknowledgments respecting the defects of his discourses, both as to matter and style, and also with regard to the indications they might exhibit of a corrupt bias remaining in his heart. In his Preface to the sermon on "the necessity and profitableness of good works," dated Portmoak, June 6, 1726; after stating the order which preachers ought to observe in the declaration of the truth, by teaching first of all the doctrines to be believed, and then inculcating the duties to be performed, he thus proceeds: "Our words, who are ministers, do many times betray the legality of our hearts; which I speak in a way of regret from my own sad experience, not in a way of reflection upon others. And I make no doubt that such as have a true taste of the Gospel may find something of this in the following discourse, though I have endeavoured to shun it as much as I could." "If by the publication of these imperfect scraps," he adds, "any shall be provoked to handle this or any other subjects with more accuracy, which may easily be done, I will heartily rejoice. And if

* Works, vol. i. p. 116.

either the Church of God, or any particular soul, shall be edified by reading this, or any other of the quarrelled sermons, he owes no thanks to me, but only to that God, who, by his over-ruling providence, makes the wrath of man to praise him; and, for my own part, I desire to believe that the remainder of his wrath he will restrain.”*

Such were the principal features in the character of this eminent and amiable man. He had, without question, his faults and imperfections; of some of which, express notice has been taken in the course of this publication. During one period of his ministry at least, he had not escaped certain misconceptions, common amongst devout people of that age, respecting the interpretation to be put on strong impressions in prayer.† His zeal, it has been admitted, in prosecuting the public interests of religion, though justified by its occasion, and usually kept under the control of meekness and discretion, may sometimes have had its overflowings.‡ In a word, to represent him as exempt from human imperfection would be to contradict his own unreserved statements in his Diary regarding those operations of indwelling sin, which he felt and deplored.¶ But, however humbling the views he entertained of himself, and whatever real spots and defects in his character, it is possible for either a friend or an enemy to point out, who can reasonably doubt that the high moral qualities he was enabled to display, were peculiarly ornamental to his profession as a Christian, to his office

* Works, vol. i. p. 118. † Pages 309-311.

‡ Pages 413, 428.

¶ Pages 92-95, 107, 117-121, &c.

as a Minister, and to the conspicuous place assigned to him in providence as the Father of the Secession Church? May all the ministers and members of that Church be followers of him, as he was of Christ! May the slight sketch which has now been drawn, serve, through the power of that Holy Spirit, who abideth in the Church for ever, to allure every reader, in a manner suited to his station, to emulate that illustrious pattern of the Christian graces which this man of God was helped to exhibit!

Having thus attempted a delineation of his character as a man and a Christian, and having formerly detailed some particulars of his ministry, both at Portmoak and at Stirling, it would be superfluous to resume the consideration of his conduct generally as a pastor in the church. We must advert a little further, nevertheless, to his excellencies as a **PREACHER**.

We have seen, that though his original views of the Gospel were defective and confused, he became decidedly evangelical. After obtaining the knowledge, and experiencing in his own soul the salutary power of the doctrines of grace, he declared them clearly and boldly to others, and gave them all that prominence which their vast importance requires. His ardent attachment to these doctrines, and his resolution to make them the chief topic of his sermons, are often strongly and happily expressed.* His discourses, at the same time, by no means consisted of mere abstract reasonings on evangelical points. He was careful to make a close

* See, for example, the Preface to the sermon on Good Works, vol. ii. p. 116. Compare extracts from Diary, pp. 120-1.

application of the truth to the conscience and heart, and to illustrate its sanctifying influence on the temper and practice. It was the remark of an aged and venerable man, who had often heard him in his youth, that "Mr. Erskine had a peculiar talent of entering into the heart and conscience of sinners, and into all the hopes and fears, the joys and griefs, the very life and death of saints; and that he never heard one preach, who could, so well as he, bring, as it were, the Saviour and the sinner together."*

Influenced by an earnest desire to save the souls of his hearers, and to further the cause of vital religion, he used great plainness of speech. His language was at once simple and nervous. His arrangements were generally natural; and though, agreeably to the fashion of the times, his divisions of the subject were numerous, they were enriched with useful and striking illustrations. He usually wrote his discourses with care; but did not confine himself entirely to what he had prepared; and such was the self-possession he was enabled to maintain, that "what he delivered in public had often the advantage of his notes, both for closeness of connection, and accuracy of expression."†

His appearance and manner were, no doubt, conducive to the acceptability and usefulness of his public ministrations. He had a manly and interesting countenance,‡ and a strong, yet pleasant voice. His elo-

* Portmoak MS.

† Works, vol. i. p. xxxix.

‡ We have seen three original Paintings of Mr. E. Erskine; one drawn before he left Portmoak, and now the property of the Rev. Ebenezer Brown, Inverkeithing, which represents him as possessing sweet and engaging features; and other two that

cution was natural, easy, and distinct. His address, far removed from every thing austere and forbidding, was at once grave, alluring, and impressive. His whole demeanour in the pulpit, in short, was characterized by a *singular dignity*, well suited to the sacred office of a messenger from the Lord of hosts, and to the important and delightful message he announced. His numerous admirers could hardly speak, without rapture, of his noble and dignified appearance. Many years ago, for example, the late Rev. WILLIAM HUTTON of Dalkeith, in our own hearing, pronounced with great emotion the following eulogy; "I never saw so much of the *majesty of God* in any mortal man as in Ebenezer Erskine." The Rev. ADAM GIBB, too, is said to have thus expressed himself. Some time after Mr. Erskine's death, having asked the late Rev. Robert Campbell, of Stirling, if ever he had heard him, an answer was returned in the negative. "Well then, Sir," rejoined Mr. Gibb, "you never heard the Gospel *in its majesty*."

Discourses which are full of interesting truth, and delivered with animation and dignity, can scarcely fail to be heard with attention and delight. Among the hearers of this excellent preacher, a drowsy or inattentive person was rarely to be seen. At one time, however, it is said, observing some of the audience asleep,

were taken at a later period of his life, in which much of gravity and dignity is mixed with a pleasing aspect. One of these two belongs to Mr. Walter Wardlaw, Glasgow; the other to Mr. Robert Simpson, Edinburgh. The latter, being that from which the Portrait in this volume is taken, was pronounced by the late Mrs. Scott the best likeness of her father she had seen.

he made a solemn pause, and then exclaimed, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." The following incident also deserves to be recorded. Two men having been in the habit of travelling together more than twenty English miles to hear him at Stirling, one of them, on a certain Sabbath, finding himself apt to be overcome with drowsiness during the time of the sermon, asked his companion to give him a snuff. But while he complied with his fellow-traveller's request, all alive to the impression of the precious truths to which he was eagerly listening, he whispered in his ear this striking reproof;—"O man! there is a savour coming out of that pulpit, which, I think, might keep any person awake."

The following anecdote will serve to illustrate the effect which the serene dignity of his manner, combined with the authority of his character, was fitted to produce. Soon after the commencement of the Secession, while the public mind was greatly agitated by the ecclesiastical occurrences then taking place, some highly applauding, and others keenly reprobating the procedure of the Associate Presbytery, several inhabitants of a parish in the vicinity of Stirling (the parish of *Airth*, it is said) requested Mr. Erskine to come and preach to them, which he consented to do. A number of the parishioners, however, displeased at the request, after mutual consultation, determined to prevent the sermon. The friends of Mr. Erskine were equally zealous, and resolved that he should not be hindered. Both parties having assembled in great numbers, and having taken their measures by placing themselves opposite to one another, on the ground that lay between the house where the minister stopped, and the appoint-

ed place of meeting for worship, the hour arrived, and nothing short of a fierce conflict was immediately dreaded. Mr. Erskine, however, no sooner made his appearance, than the turbulent passions of his enemies were completely allayed. He stepped forward with so cool and collected an air, and with so much composure and dignity, that an instantaneous impression was produced in his favour. As he walked betwixt the hostile ranks, the two parties seemed to rival each other in expressing their respect, and they speedily mingled their voices in one song of praise. The Psalm which he gave out on that occasion was sufficiently appropriate—Ps. xxvii. 3.

“ Against me though an host encamp,
My heart yet fearless is ;” &c.

The reader will recollect that some notices of the *success* of his preaching and other ministerial labours first at Portmoak, and then at Stirling, were formerly given. To these we shall only add the following testimony to the utility as well as popularity of his ministry at Stirling. It is an extract from a Petition to the Provost, Bailies, and Town Council of that place by the Dean of Guild, for himself and his Guild Brethren, requesting them to employ every means to prevent the threatened suspension of Mr. Erskine by the Commission of Assembly—bearing date the 27th July, 1733:—“ By the good hand of his Master upon him, he has delivered his mind and will to us in the glorious Gospel, both in preaching and in performing the other ministerial duties, to the great satisfaction and approbation of all that hear him. . . . We are afraid of any thing that has the least appearance to deprive us of the said Mr. Erskine’s ministry, to which we are hopeful it has

pleased the Lord to append *several seals*, since his coming among us."

The usefulness of this faithful herald of the cross was extended in some degree during his life-time, and has been subsequently prolonged, by the publication of a number of his sermons. The circumstances which obliged him to become an AUTHOR were formerly adverted to.* The complaints of offended brethren having compelled him to publish a few of his sermons for his own vindication, he became less backward than formerly to comply with the earnest solicitations of pious hearers, who wished to have an opportunity of reading discourses, from which, when delivered from the pulpit, they had received much instruction and comfort. Accordingly, both before and after his translation to Stirling, he gave to the world a considerable number of separate discourses in small pamphlets; some of which were published anonymously, partly from modesty, and partly because the General Assembly, in order to prevent the spread of the Marrow doctrine, had thought proper to enjoin all the ministers under their inspection to publish no sermons or treatises, without having first submitted them to the revisal of the Courts. A few of these detached sermons, with similar ones, of which his brother Ralph was the author, were collected and published in London, with a Recommendation by the Rev. THOMAS BRADBURY, the celebrated author of Discourses on "the Mystery of Godliness." One volume, and then other two volumes of sermons by these Brothers were thus edited, and proved highly

* Page 243.

acceptable to many in England, about twenty years before the works of either were collected in Scotland. In the year 1761, the Rev. James Fisher published at Edinburgh, in four volumes, *duodecimo*, a complete collection of all the sermons which Ebenezer had printed during his life. A volume of discourses never before printed, had been previously edited in the same city in 1755, by his son Mr. David Erskine. From the editor's Preface, it appears that his father had entrusted him with the publication of those sermons after his death; and that with regard to the order in which they are arranged, as well as the title prefixed to each, he "scrupulously adhered to the directions" he received from his father before his decease. The volume is dedicated to the Right Honourable Elizabeth, Countess of Northumberland, whose "generous assistance" afforded for the publication is gratefully acknowledged. The contents of these five volumes have subsequently undergone numerous and large impressions, in a variety of forms. The latest complete collection, so far as we know, is that consisting of two volumes, in large 8vo. which was printed at London in the year 1826.*

Attempts have been made to enlarge the usefulness of these works by selection and abridgment, if not by translation. Some years ago, at the suggestion of some pious ladies, the sermons on "the Assurance of Faith" were printed separately in a small volume; and they have now reached a third edition. In the year 1827, two small volumes, 12mo. were published at London, apparently by one of the Wesleyan Methodists,

* This is the edition to which references in the course of this volume are uniformly made.

entitled "A Series of Sermons on important and interesting subjects, by the late Ebenezer Erskine, Minister of the Gospel at Stirling, carefully abridged, *corrected, and revised.*"* A selection of striking and instructive passages from his works, entitled "The Beauties of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine," prepared by the Rev. Samuel M'Millan, Aberdeen, and recommended by a number of respectable ministers, has been very lately printed at Glasgow. The sermons of both the Erskines, that were collected by Mr. Bradbury, have been translated, we are told, into the Welsh language, and greatly valued among that people.

It is not our intention to institute any critical inquiry respecting the merits of Ebenezer's sermons. That they have no pretensions to that elegance of diction and refinement of taste which constitute the chief recommendation of many fashionable volumes, is readily admitted. Nor are we unwilling to allow, that a fastidious reader of the present age may be apt to feel somewhat displeased at his pointed allusion to various subjects that were keenly discussed at the time when they were preached, unless he possess some previous knowledge of those controversies, and be prepared to make reasonable and candid allowances for the liberties taken by the preacher. But that they are on the whole conducive, in a high degree, to the purposes of spiritual edification, will not be easily questioned by the genuine friends of the Gospel; and might be presumed, with some appearance of reason, from the extensive circulation which they have long had, and con-

* See Appendix, No. XI.

tinue to have, amongst serious Christians in Britain, and other parts of the world.

In the course of these memoirs we have occasionally alluded to some of these sermons. Particular notice might be taken of several others, as distinguished for "argument and substance," or for the lively and interesting manner in which evangelical truth is brought home to the reader. But suffice it only to notice his discourses on "the Assurance of Faith," which discover the hand of a master, and have been remarkably blessed for the relief of the perplexed and disconsolate. His views on that topic, we may remark, though higher than many Christians approve, are widely different from certain notions on assurance, which of late have been zealously maintained and diffused.*

* This is an allusion to the doctrine held by Thomas Erskine, Esq. and others, who make universal pardon the foundation of assurance. The late able, and justly lamented Dr. Thomson, having mentioned the Marrow of Modern Divinity, has the following remarks :—"Whatever may be said for or against the views which that volume and its supporters have given of assurance, they differ *toto cælo* from Mr. Erskine on faith, pardon, election, justification, salvation, and every point almost that he has touched upon in his Essay. . . . The following sentence, extracted from the writings of one of the Marrow-men, as they are called, will show how contrary their sentiments were to Mr. Erskine's. 'I do not say, the first language of faith is, Christ died for me, or I was elected from eternity; but the language of faith is, 'God offers a living and crucified Saviour to me, and I take the slain Christ for my Saviour, and in my taking and embracing of him as offered, I have ground to conclude I was elected, and that he died for me in particular, and not before.' (*Eb. Erskine on Saving Faith.*") See the Doctrine of Universal Pardon, Considered and Refuted, &c. by And. Thomson, D.D. App. Note EE.

The works of Mr. Erskine have, by the divine blessing, proved truly beneficial, not only to private Christians, but to a considerable number of ministers ; who have frankly acknowledged both the benefit they have reaped from them to their own souls, and the salutary influence which his writings have exercised on their labours for the spiritual welfare of others. Some late writers having inconsiderately denounced the discourses of the Erskines as void of substance and savour, it seems proper here to present to the reader a specimen of the many warm and decided testimonies to their substantial excellence and undoubted utility, which have been spontaneously given by clergymen of high reputation for learning, piety, and worth.

The Rev. THOMAS BRADBURY, mentioned above, a celebrated Dissenter in London, gives them the following character in his commendatory Preface : “ In these Sermons, the reader will find a faithful adherence to the design of the Gospel, a clear defence of those doctrines that are the pillar and ground of truth, a large compass of thought, a strong force of argument, and a happy flow of words, both judicious and familiar.”

The Rev. WILLIAM CUDWORTH, pastor of an Independent Congregation, London, an intimate friend of Mr. Hervey, and author of “ Aphorisms on the Assurance of Faith,” when detailing his exercise with regard to the doctrine of grace, expresses his opinion in these words : “ I learned that the Messrs. Erskine were upon this foundation, and therefore sought after all their sermons and writings I could get, and found them very precious to me.”*

* Brown's Christian Experience, pp. 12, 13.

The encomium which the Rev. JAMES HERVEY himself pronounced on Ebenezer Erskine's discourses is well known. In the sixteenth Dialogue of his Theron and Aspasio, that pious and lively writer says in a note:—"Were I to read in order to refine my taste, or improve my style, I would prefer Bishop Atterbury's sermons, Dr. Bates' works, or Mr. Seed's discourses. But were I to read with a single view to the edification of my heart in true faith, solid comfort, and evangelical holiness, I would have recourse to Mr. ERSKINE, and take his volumes for my guide, my companion, and my familiar friend."

Another clergyman of the Church of England, eminent for the strength of his intellect, and the extent of his learning, as well as for the ardour of his piety,—the Rev. AUGUSTUS TOPLADY, seems to have formed an equally favourable judgment of those volumes. Far from esteeming them "dry" and uninteresting, he feelingly acknowledges the great refreshment they were the means of imparting to his soul. Let two extracts from his Diary suffice.—"*Friday, 22d Jan. 1768.*—At night I spent three or four hours reading Erskine's sermons, particularly the following ones—'The rent veil of the temple,—The harmony of the Divine attributes,—*The believer exalted in imputed righteousness,**—and Faith's plea on God's word and covenant.' The reading of these sweet discourses was wonderfully blessed to my soul. Great was my rejoicing and triumphing in Christ. The Lord was with me of a truth, and his

* This is the subject of one of Mr. Ebenezer's Sermons. The other discourses specified in this first extract are by Ralph Erskine.

gracious visitation revived my spirit. One moment's communion with Christ—one moment's view of interest in him is ineffable—inestimable.” “ *Wednesday, 10th Feb.* The Lord was very gracious to my soul this afternoon. His Spirit was the Comforter; and Mr. [Ebenezer] Erskine's two sermons on the Rainbow of the Covenant were the channel through which that comfort was conveyed.”*

The sermons of both the Erskines are also mentioned in very respectful terms by the late Dr. WILLIAMS in his *Preacher*, in a list of books on Theology, which he recommends to students and ministers; and by the venerable and candid Dr. JOHN ERSKINE, of Edinburgh, in a note that occurs in the first volume of his Sermons.

To these respectable authorities, which are in no degree liable to the imputation of that partiality which private friendship or close ecclesiastical connection is apt to create, we may subjoin the sentiments expressed by two worthy ministers, more intimately connected with the writer whose works they recommend. The one is the late Rev. ARCHIBALD HALL of London, who, in his “Treatise on the Faith and Influence of the Gospel,” makes the following acknowledgment: “It is with particular pleasure that the author embraces this opportunity of acknowledging his vast obligations to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine's sermons on ‘the Assurance of Faith,’ and to Mr. Hervey's Theron and Aspasio, Dial. 16. He wishes the reader would carefully peruse these excellent performances in order to direct and enlarge his views.”†

* Toplady's Works, vol. i. pp. 37-40. † Page 311. Note.

The other individual to whom we refer, is that able and eloquent man, the late Rev. ROBERT CAMPBELL, who having succeeded Ebenezer and James Erskine in the pastoral charge of the Associate Congregation, Stirling, ministered long and faithfully amongst that numerous flock. In a sensible and pious letter, which he wrote to Mrs. Fisher, Glasgow, in the year 1768, immediately after his recovery from a dangerous illness, he gives an account of his own experience during his affliction; and having mentioned the comfort imparted to him by means of that gracious declaration, "I am the Lord thy God," he adds,—“Your father’s sermon upon this comprehensive promise hath been very pleasant to me since I came home; and if he said it was the best sermon ever he preached, I am very sure I can say that to *me* it is the best of all *his* sermons, or of any other sermons that ever I read. What good Mr. Hervey says of the 14th chapter of Hosea, I would, with the proper limitation, be ready to say of this excellent sermon, ‘that it not only deserves a place in our memories, but ought to be engraven upon the fleshly tables of our hearts.’ It shall often be my companion while I live.”*

His sermons were almost the only publications of which Mr. Erskine was exclusively the author. We have seen, however, that he was employed to prepare the Representation to the Assembly respecting the condemnation of the Marrow, and the first sketch of the “Answers to the Twelve Queries;”† and that he pub-

* Extracted from the original. Part of this Letter, however, is inserted in the Ch. Monitor, vol. i. pp. 674-5.

† See page 236.

lished a small pamphlet, entitled "The True State of the Question, &c."* Very possibly he compiled also another pamphlet, to which frequent references are made in the 8th Chapter of this work—"The True State of the Process against Mr. Ebenezer Erskine," &c. He appears to have at least borne a part in composing the "Reasons for not acceding to the Established Church," published by "the Protesting Ministers" in 1734.† The "Act of the Associate Presbytery concerning the Doctrine of Grace," enacted, October 21, 1742, was the fruit of the united labour of Mr. Erskine, and the Rev. Alexander Moncrieff.‡ "This work, though it may sometimes perplex by its numerous divisions, and its technical phraseology, yet contains an able exposition and vindication of the doctrine of Scripture,"§ on a variety of interesting points, connected with the Marrow controversy, and, at the same time, immediately affecting the experience, comfort, and practice of the Christian. The only other production which remains to be mentioned, is that large and instructive explanation of the Shorter Catechism, usually called "The Synod's Catechism." From its preface, dated February 1753, it appears that materials having been collected by a number of ministers, the two Er-

* See page 447.

† This opinion is founded on the circumstance that we have in our possession, a Manuscript by Mr. Erskine in his own shorthand characters, consisting of four closely written quarto pages, entitled "Some Reasons for not acceding to the Judicatories of the Church of Scotland, notwithstanding what was done by the last Assembly, and the Synod of Perth."

‡ Gospel-Truth, p. 63.

§ See Testimony of the Unit. Ass. Syn. pp. 55-58. where "a brief outline" is given of this work.

skines and Mr. Fisher were requested by the Synod to revise them, and that all the three were concerned in composing the first part of that work. The leisure hours of two aged brothers, standing on the verge of eternity, whose lives had been devoted to the study and diffusion of the glorious Gospel, could scarcely have been employed in a service more appropriate, or more signally conducive to the interests of truth and godliness.* Many are the impressions which that Catechism has undergone; and though its utility might be increased by a judicious attempt to simplify its sentences,—it will long continue, we trust, to be highly valued, and extensively perused.

To gratify the reasonable expectations of the reader, we shall now lay before him a short account of Mr. Erskine's *family and descendants*.

ALISON TURPIE, his first wife, became the mother, it will be recollected, of *ten* children; four of whom,—three sons and one daughter, died in childhood at Portmoak.† Of the remaining six, two were sons—Ebenezer and David, and four were daughters.

EBENEZER, the eldest son, who attained the age of manhood, is respectfully mentioned in the Portmoak manuscript as a great adept in the art of short-hand writing. Whether his proficiency in the more essential branches of a liberal education equalled his progress in stenography, we cannot positively say; but in the year

* The writer happens to possess part of the original materials for the Catechism, prepared in short-hand characters by both brothers. Those written by Ebenezer extend from the 8th to the 28th Question; those by Ralph from the 76th to the 95th.

† See pages 305-6.

1733 he betook himself to a seafaring life. We have seen a well-written letter from him to his brother-in-law, Mr. Fisher, dated "Deal, August 21, 1733," when commencing a voyage to a distant part of the globe. He acknowledges a letter which he had just received from his father, and affectionately requests the prayers of his relatives. He expresses strong apprehensions of the perils awaiting him at sea and in foreign climes; and these appear to have been too well justified by the event; for, so far as we know, he was not spared to return to his native country.

DAVID was a young man of excellent character and good capacity; and distinguished himself at the University of Edinburgh by his attainments in literature, philosophy, and theology. Referring to him, one of the most noted of his father's ecclesiastical opposers is reported to have said, "That fanatic has a son, who will one day prove a bright ornament to the Church of Scotland." But owing partly, it was believed, to the ardour with which he prosecuted the study of some of the abstruser sciences, and partly to the excitement occasioned by the keen interest he took in the *Cambuslang work*, his nervous system lost some portion of its vigour, and his attention was, in consequence, directed to pursuits less momentous than those he had originally in view. For several years he resided in the vicinity of Morpeth, and employed himself in the instruction of youth. He stood much indebted to the generous attentions of his nephew, Mr. Ralph Fisher. We have perused, with great pleasure, a series of letters which, during the course of a long correspondence, he wrote to his sister Mrs. Scott; from whom he received many tokens of kind affection. His remarks discover consi-

derable humour and acuteness, as well as devotional feeling, and are often strikingly expressed. He was an infant, we find, under the care of a nurse in spring 1718; and died at Edinburgh, in a good old age, about the year 1800.

The four daughters who reached maturity, seem to have all profited by parental instruction and example; and were all respectably and happily married.

JEAN, the eldest, was born about the year 1706. On the 4th July, 1727, she was married at Portmoak, by her uncle Ralph, to the Rev. JAMES FISHER, and lived till December 1771.

Mr. Fisher, according to his own account in a family register before us, was the second son of the Rev. Thomas Fisher, "minister first at Barr, in the Presbytery of Ayr, then at Rhynd, near Perth, and Susanna Menzies." He was born at Barr, Saturday, Jan. 23, 1697." He received license from the Presbytery of Perth; and at the beginning of the year 1726, he was ordained minister of the parish of Kinclaven, in the Presbytery of Dunkeld. He gave early proofs of his zeal for evangelical truth and religious liberty. He was one of six ministers, who first held private meetings to confer about adopting proper means to stem the torrent of defection, and resolved on presenting the important Representation and Petition, subscribed at last by forty-two ministers and three elders, and laid on the Assembly's table in 1732.* Actuated not merely by

* We have learned this fact from a passage in Mr. Wilson's Diary, cited by Mr. Ferrier in his Memoirs, p. 176. The other five Brethren referred to were, the Rev. Messrs. Wilson of Perth, Gillespie of Strathmiglo, Laing of Newburgh, M'Intosh of Errol, Moncrieff of Abernethy.

personal attachment to his father-in-law, but by an enlightened sense of duty, he gave him, as we have seen, his warm and steady support; and actively concurred with him in the various measures resorted to by the Associate Brethren. Having received a unanimous call to the Congregation of Shuttle Street,* Glasgow, he was translated from Kinclaven, and admitted minister of that congregation in October 8, 1741. His able ministrations and exemplary conduct raised him to high estimation, not only with his people, but among persons of every rank and denomination in Glasgow. He had the satisfaction also to see, that, notwithstanding his removal from his first charge, a meeting-house was soon erected at Kinclaven, and frequented by a respectable congregation. Mr. Fisher was chosen Clerk to the Associate Presbytery at its first meeting at the Bridge of Gairney, and continued to hold that office for a series of years. In 1749, also, as was formerly stated, two years after the breach, he was appointed Professor of Divinity, when the state of Mr. Erskine's health obliged him to resign that important office.† In this capacity he acquitted himself with great fidelity, and gave universal satisfaction, till the year 1764, in which, being compelled by bodily infirmities to give it up, he was succeeded by the Rev. John Swanston of Kinross. Messrs. John Patison, Edinburgh; James Erskine, and Robert Campbell, Stirling; John Brown, Haddington; Archibald Hall, London; Alexander Shanks, Jedburgh; John Low, Biggar; William Arnot, Kennoway; and many other respected ministers, attended Mr. Fisher's Theological class. In the year 1771, Mr. George

* Now Grey Friars.

† See the close of chap. ix.

Henderson, a gifted, pious, and amiable young man, was ordained his assistant and successor in his pastoral charge. Mr. Fisher died on the 28th Sept. 1775, in the 79th year of his age and the 50th of his ministry. He was the youngest of the four Brethren, and survived the other three a considerable time. Possessing excellent talents, he exercised them with unwearied diligence. Alluding, probably, to his clearness of judgment and vivacity of manner, as well as to his unaffected piety and spirituality of mind, his friend Mr. Wilson said of him, "Our neighbour Mr. Fisher has *the face of an eagle*."* Mr. Andrew Swanston, after hearing him preach at Glasgow in his old age, observed to an acquaintance, that "neither as to sentiment, composition, nor delivery, had he ever heard his superior." Mr. Shanks, too, spoke warmly of his Professor, and eulogized the fluency and accuracy with which he expressed his ideas, not only in the pulpit, but on all occasions. We have seen a number of his letters to friends, and to several members of his family, which breathe a truly pious, faithful, and affectionate spirit. Not to mention his controversial pamphlets, he published a number of occasional sermons, as one preached at Fenwick, from Prov. xxiii. 23; a discourse on preaching Christ, delivered at the ordination of Mr. James Mair, at West Linton, 29th May 1740; and one on "the character of a faithful minister of Christ," preached at Stirling, immediately after the ordination of the Rev. James Erskine, and commonly inserted among the sermons of Ebenezer Erskine. We should notice also his Prefaces to the Works of both the Er-

* Mem. of the Rev. W. Wilson, p. 357.

skines, and the prominent part he held in composing the Synod's Catechism,—particularly the second part, which, from that circumstance, is very often styled *Fisher's Catechism*.*

Mrs. Fisher's conduct, in riper years, seems to have corresponded with her dutiful behaviour, in early life, to her father and mother, and with the pleasing hopes they entertained.† We have seen two letters addressed by her to one of her daughters, which are strongly expressive of humility and Christian resignation, under the various bereavements and trials she experienced. She gave birth to no less than fifteen children, of whom *Susanna*, the oldest, was born May 17, 1728, and *Anne*, the youngest, May 20, 1749. The greater part of them were cut off at an early age, by the diseases incident to childhood. Her son, *Ebenezer Fisher*, a twin, and the second so named, was born at Kinclaven, Jan. 8, 1739, and died in the prime of life at Newbern, North Carolina, Aug. 18, 1767. *Ralph* was born at Glasgow, March 12, 1743, and died at Belfast, Ireland, on his way home from Jamaica, in the year 1792.

The daughters of this family, who came of age, inherited their mother's virtues, and proved blessings to their husbands and to society. *Jean* married the Rev. James Erskine, Stirling, in January 1754, but lost her much-loved husband in 1761, and was herself removed by death, at Glasgow, May 2, 1762. *Alison* was united with the Rev. Robert Campbell, Stirling, but departed this life a short time after marriage. *Mary* gave her hand to Mr. *John Gray*, Printer, Edinburgh, an excel-

* See Appendix, No. XII.

† Compare pages 156-7, 280-1, 290.

lent man, but died three months after the birth of her only child *Erskine Gray*. This child, when only about seven years old, had also the unhappiness to lose her father; but she experienced the care of Him who is "the orphan's stay," and, by the grace of God, became a very excellent and amiable female. In the year 1793 she married the Rev. Ebenezer Brown, Inverkeithing; and after signally exemplifying "the meekness of wisdom" as a Christian, a wife, and a mother, she died happily, Jan. 13, 1821.*

We ought also to notice other two daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, whose descendants are well known in Glasgow;—*Margaret*, who married Walter Ewing Mac-lae, Esq. of Cathkin; and *Anne*, the second wife of the late William Wardlaw, Esq. mother of a large family, including that celebrated Preacher and Author, the Rev. Dr. *Ralph Wardlaw*.

MARGARET, another daughter of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, was married, Nov. 8, 1736, to Mr. James Wardlaw, Dunfermline;† but, according to a memorandum in Mr. Ralph Erskine's Diary, she died, "much lamented," Sept. 6, 1737. She fell a victim to a fever, which seized her soon after she had borne a female child, who survived her mother a very short time.

ANNE appears to have resided at Dunfermline, with her uncle Ralph, during the period of his widowhood. She gave her hand, probably, about the year 1740, to Mr. *James Jaffray*, bookseller, Stirling; and having

* An interesting account of Mrs. Brown appeared in the Christ. Monitor, vol. ii. pp. 242-8.

† Compare 461.

lost her husband in October 1756, she seems, chiefly in order to facilitate personal intercourse with her beloved sister Mrs. Scott, to have removed soon after to Kelso. She had no children, and survived Mr. Jaffray, probably, only a few years. Her letters to Mrs. Scott, a number of which we have read, discover ardent piety, a lively spirit, and a benevolent heart.

ALISON, the youngest, we believe, of Ebenezer's four daughters by the first marriage, was united about the close of the year 1745, to the Rev. *James Scott*, Gatheshall.

Mr. Scott was ordained minister of the Associate Congregation of that place, May 13, 1742, and lived till February 6, 1773. During the whole course of his ministry, he was never once disabled by affliction for the public services of the Lord's Day, except on the three Sabbaths immediately preceding his death. He discharged the public and private duties of his office with great care and fidelity. His brethren esteemed him a man "of ingenuous simplicity, incapable of disguising his sentiments." Notwithstanding the difference of opinion between him and Mrs. Scott, regarding the subject of controversy which agitated and rent the Secession Church in 1747, he never ceased to act the part of a most affectionate and attentive husband. The year after his death, a small volume of his discourses, in 12mo, was published with this title, "A Collection of Sermons on various important and interesting subjects." The sermons are characterized by purity of evangelical sentiment, and scriptural simplicity of diction. An "advertisement" is prefixed, containing a short account of the author. His Note-books, which

are still in the hands of his descendants, are all very neatly and carefully written.

Mrs. Scott survived her husband forty years. Having reached the great age of ninety-four years and a half, she died at the house of her daughter-in-law, Mrs. William Scott, Edinburgh, January 13, 1814. She was a woman of eminent piety, and of uncommon resolution. Her letters to her sister Mrs. Jaffray, and others, breathe much of the Christian temper. Her veneration for her father's memory was singularly great; and she seems, in particular, to have emulated his firm and constant dependence on the faithful promises of God. During a certain juncture at the beginning of this century, when a French invasion was generally dreaded, she happened to be in company with a number of ladies, who began, with a sorrowful countenance, to express themselves in a tone of most distressing apprehension regarding the consequences of that deprecated event; but after listening for a little to their melancholy language, she proceeded to reprove their immoderate solicitude and timidity, saying, "Come, my ladies, lay aside your unbelieving fears, remember that *the Lord reigns*." The following anecdote also manifests decision of character as well as a sense of religion. At one time she found herself among a party of gentlemen, by whom the worldly circumstances of ministers becoming the topic of conversation, remarks were thrown out, of which she could not approve. For a considerable while she said nothing, but at last opening her mouth with a dignified air and a decided tone, she put them all to silence with these words, "Well, you may say what you please concern-

ing the situation of ministers, but, let me tell you, that a minister of the *Gospel* holds a more honourable office than a minister of *State*." Having lived by the faith of the Son of God, and continued to the last to adorn her profession, she bade a final adieu to the scenes of time, expressing a sure and triumphant hope of the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," mentioned in the 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians, which was read to her about 9 o'clock in the morning, a little before her decease.

She had three sons. *Ebenezer* the eldest died at an early age, in August 1756. *William Scott* of Ashieburn, the second, died in Edinburgh, August 1807. The third son, named also *Ebenezer*, was for many years a respectable medical practitioner in Dalkeith, and departed this life at that town April 27, 1828, leaving a married daughter and four sons, the eldest of whom, Mr. *James Scott*, accountant, Edinburgh, died the 5th March, 1830.

We do not certainly know the precise number of Mr. Erskine's children by his second wife. She had two sons, *James* and *Alexander*, who died abroad; the first about the year 1770, and the second in 1779. From a memorandum, written by their father in a Note-book, in May 1728, it appears that three daughters of the second marriage were living at that time,—*Mary*, *Helen*, and *Rachel*. *MARY*, however, was the only one of them that reached maturity. She possessed a cheerful and lively temper. After her mother's death she kept her father's house, and, during his last affliction, waited on him in a dutiful and affectionate

manner. She was never married, and died at Glasgow about the year 1786.

These slight notices of Mr. Erskine's family are fitted to remind us of the encouraging declarations and promises of Scripture respecting the children of the pious. Though, in modern as well as ancient times, the soundest instructions and the brightest examples are sometimes frustrated by the power of depravity, and by the snares of the devil and the world, the conscientious and prudent efforts of Christian parents for the spiritual welfare of their offspring are generally blessed to a greater or less extent. The descendants of the faithful cannot abandon the ways of wisdom without involving themselves in aggravated guilt and ruin. But "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them."*

To illustrate, particularly, the practical lessons which these Memoirs suggest, would be tedious and quite superfluous. It may suffice, in conclusion, very briefly to notice a few of the most important.

The undoubted instances of vital religion we have been contemplating in Henry Erskine of Chirnside and his son Ebenezer, may serve to show its reality and value, and to recommend it to people of every rank and occupation. The manifest and salutary influence of personal piety on the official conduct and the comfort

* Psalm ciii. 17, 18.

of the Christian Pastor, under varied circumstances of difficulty and trial, should induce all who are invested with the ministry, or candidates for that office, to make it their first concern to cultivate real godliness in their own souls.

“The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” The bare knowledge or profession of Christianity, separate from a living faith and a praying heart, is utterly insufficient to prepare any man for performing acceptable service to Christ, either in a public or a private sphere. Nor should we deem it enough to admit, or even to be seriously impressed with those doctrines which relate generally to the existence and Providence of God, moral obligation, and the solemn realities of a future state. The worth of *evangelical principles*, in opposition to erroneous tenets, by which the glory of the Saviour, the necessity of his atonement, the agency of his Spirit, and the freeness of his grace, are denied or obscured, ought to be justly appreciated and deeply felt.

The details that have been given point out the importance of an open avowal of the truth, and of a firm adherence to its interest. To rest satisfied with that exact form and measure of piety which we are pleased to consider sufficient to secure our own salvation, is to act an ungenerous and dishonourable part, at variance alike with the gratitude we owe to the Saviour, and the benevolence due to mankind. Even an enlightened regard to our own safety will prompt us to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” to “confess Christ before men,” and to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”

The tender and unceasing care which God exercises

towards his Church is calculated at once to excite our gratitude, and to animate our faith. "Is not Jehovah in Zion? Is not her king in her?" Is it not established by many signal displays of his power and grace, that he can rebuke the spirit of error and delusion, control the rage of tyranny, and effect deliverance for his people, when oppressed, and almost overwhelmed by the power of the enemy? In the darkest and most inauspicious times, when all hope of relief appears to be cut off, He, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, provides adequate instruments to plead the cause of Zion with integrity and zeal, and crowns their efforts with success.

The acknowledged imperfections from which the most faithful witnesses and reformers are not exempt, should induce us to ascribe entirely to God the glory of every seasonable appearance in defence of the truth, and of every successful exertion put forth in behalf of the privileges and liberties of the Christian Church. We must learn, at the same time, to call no man Master: "One is your Master, even Christ." Whilst we maintain the grand doctrines for which our worthy ancestors contended, and imitate what was best in their temper and demeanour, it becomes us to see that we neither adopt their misconceptions, nor copy their faults and defects. Avoiding equally a blind veneration for antiquity and a prurient fondness for novelty, we should "prove all things" by the infallible standard of holy writ, and strive to go forward in the career of improvement.

The Secession Church is peculiarly called to ponder well the responsibility connected with the advantages which Divine Providence has afforded, by means of the

faithfulness, wisdom, and fortitude, displayed by its founders. Its members should universally feel the powerful ties by which they are bound, not only to hold fast the truths and ordinances of Christ, but to exert themselves in the noble work of diffusing his glorious Gospel, both at home and abroad. Whatever they have done in this cause individually, and in subserviency to the designs of various religious and benevolent societies, their zeal and activity, it must be confessed, at least in their capacity as a distinct and organized Church, have not hitherto been equal to their obligations and opportunities. Let them hail the present appearances of generous ardour breaking forth among them, and be careful to fan the sacred flame, that from them "the word of the Lord may sound out" in every direction. By their prayers, contributions, and varied efforts, let them emulate the Moravian Brethren, and some other churches, that have gone before them in this great work, and highly to their own credit and spiritual advantage, used prompt and active endeavours to communicate light to them that sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death. The importance of missionary enterprises having been now so clearly shown, and their practicability and usefulness so palpably demonstrated to the Christian world, what church, that fails to distinguish itself by its missionary spirit and exertions, can be expected to prosper under the smiles of Heaven, or to share in the refreshing dews from above?

While the churches of the Secession pursue measures subservient either to their own increase, or to the general propagation of Christian knowledge, they should, without question, beware of declining from that

high tone of moral and religious feeling by which they were once characterized. Were they to lose in purity what they gain in extension, their apparent prosperity would soon prove illusive. Owing chiefly, we believe, to precipitance and rivalry, several false and aggravated representations of the decay of piety among Seceders have been published and industriously circulated. But whatever cause there may be to deplore the deadness and lukewarmness with which many churches have been seized, and which the Secession has not escaped, we could appeal to a variety of recent facts and documents, which afford satisfactory evidence that the Spirit of grace has not yet abandoned the ministers and members of that Church; and that, with regard at least to a goodly portion of their number, their religion has not dwindled away to a lifeless orthodoxy, or an empty form. It is their necessary duty, meanwhile, to keep always a conscience void of offence, and, "by well-doing, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

"It must needs be that offences come." Owing to the imperfection of the most sincere, and the intermixture of nominal professors, occasional scandals may be looked for in every society. The office-bearers of the Secession Church, however, will endeavour, it is hoped, by the vigorous and impartial exercise of scriptural discipline, to encourage the good, to check the presumptuous, and to maintain the purity of Divine institutions. Some alterations may, no doubt, take place in the mode of discipline, while its spirit is upheld, and its essential rules are enforced. But when such remissness shall prevail in any church, that the most distinguishing privileges of its membership are granted and continued to the visibly unworthy—when persons, living in open sin,

are permitted to pass without admonition or rebuke, or still higher censure, as circumstances may require ; then, indeed, on the walls of its temples, however splendid their appearance, and however numerous the worshippers, this inscription may justly be written, "*Ichabod* ; the glory is departed." "Know ye not," says the Apostle Paul, "that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump ?"*

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord," says the same inspired writer, "beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."† This is an exhortation highly deserving the attention of ministers and of Christians at large. Oh ! that the line of conduct it inculcates were uniformly pursued, not only within the limits of the United Secession Church, but in every church. Were a liberal portion of the spirit so pathetically recommended by the Apostle, to animate and govern them, the different bodies, at least of Presbyterian Dissenters in Scotland, one should think, might, without any compromise of principle, be happily united. Or if a strict ecclesiastical union be deemed impracticable or inexpedient, brotherly intercourse, and co-operation with respect to points in which they are agreed, might certainly be practised among them to a still greater extent.

Is it not also exceedingly desirable that evangelical ministers of the National Church, and of the various

* 1 Cor. v. 6.

† Ephes. iv. 1-3.

Dissenting communities, should increasingly cultivate those mutual regards which would lead them at once to promote each other's good, and to exhibit a pattern conducive to the advancement of all that is holy, and of all that is lovely, amongst the people of every class? The propriety of legal establishments of religion being a point not immediately connected with the tenor of this publication,—it was not intended either to vindicate or to decry them. The writer would only take the liberty, with all becoming deference, to say, that, while this is a legitimate subject of discussion, the contending parties will do credit to themselves by avoiding, in the agitation of the controversy, that excessive keenness, and those personal invectives, which could only prove injurious to the interests of the common faith.

While truth is exalted, let envy and bigotry be crucified. It belongs to the clergy of Established churches to shun those indications of arrogance, of which they have been sometimes accused. The time is gone by, in which the clergymen of the Church of Scotland can hope to advance their own reputation and influence, by disparaging the qualifications or condition of Dissenting ministers, or by denouncing the Secession as an “alarming evil,” and a “schism,” that has a “threatening aspect to the interests of religion.”* The ministers of the Secession may be expected, on their part, to avoid, and, we trust, with few exceptions, do avoid, that unchristian harshness, which would induce them, indiscriminately, to condemn the Established clergy as “hirelings,” incapable, from their situation, of faith-

* These expressions are quoted from the “Schism Overture” adopted by the General Assembly 1765.—See the Scots Magazine for that year.

fully discharging their office. Is it not far more becoming to manifest respect and affection for pious and evangelical ministers, connected with the National church, and to rejoice in every appearance of the increase of their numbers and influence? To whatever conclusion we are warranted to come on the abstract question of establishments, few will deny that the Established Church of Scotland, notwithstanding all its faults, is probably the best institution of the kind in the world. Since the first seceding ministers withdrew from it, not because it was established by law, but because its affairs were corruptly administered, may not their successors be expected to sigh for a happy reformation, not for a total overthrow, of the National church?

Persons may believe that the magistrate has no just title to that exorbitant power and mastery in the concerns of the Church which he has often assumed, whilst they hesitate to affirm, that circumstances can never occur, in which, *as a civil ruler*, he can warrantably exercise any power at all, beyond the meanest of the people. It is one thing to say, that legal establishments are by no means necessary to the stability and prosperity of the Christian religion, or even that, in general, they have been so injudiciously formed and conducted, as rather to injure than subserve its interests; but quite another thing to assert, that a legal establishment of any sort, and under any limitations, is utterly unjust and inexpedient in all countries, and in every possible conjuncture. This last assertion, I freely confess, I am not yet prepared to make. I may have neglected to investigate the subject so closely and impartially as its importance requires. But how incompetent soever to

act the part of an umpire in this momentous contest, and however apt to shrink from the task, I cannot help seizing the present opportunity of expressing my earnest wish that ministers and other followers of Christ, though differing from each other in their sentiments on this question, and though, in some respects, separated by corresponding institutions, would make conscience of cherishing that cordial and forbearing love for one another, which is the distinguishing badge of Christianity; and exemplify, in their conduct, “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.—For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee; because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.”

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

NO. I.—PAGE 4.

THE earldom of MAR or MARR is one of those whose origin is lost in antiquity. *Martacus*, the first Earl of Mar mentioned by Douglas, flourished during the reign of Malcolm Canmore, 1065. ERSKINE became the name of the family, in consequence of the marriage of *Janet Keith*, grand-daughter of *Gratney*, the eleventh Earl, with Sir Thomas Erskine; whose only son, Sir Robert Erskine, justly claimed the earldom in the year 1435, though the peaceable possession of it was not secured till 1567. This Sir Thomas belonged to an ancient and distinguished family, which for many ages possessed the barony of *Erskine* on the Clyde, in the county of Renfrew. *Henricus de Erskine* was proprietor of that barony at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The Erskines of Shielfield are the descendants of DAVID ERSKINE, Commendator of Dryburgh, son of Robert, Master of Erskine, who was killed at the battle of Pinkie on the 10th Sep. 1547, and nephew of John, Earl of Mar, who was chosen Regent of Scotland in the year 1571.

Antiquaries give different accounts of the origin of the name *Erskine*. According to some, it was derived from the lands of the barony which has just been mentioned. But others relate the following story respecting it. In the reign of Malcolm II. a Scotsman, having killed with his own hand *Enrique*, a Danish

General, at the battle of *Murthill*, cut off his head, and, with the bloody dagger in his hand, showed it to the king, (in the Gaelic *Eris Skyne*;) and in the same language said, "I intend to perform greater actions than those I have done." Malcolm, therefore, imposed on him the surname of *Erskine*, i. e. the man with the dagger, and assigned for his armorial bearing a hand holding a dagger, with *Je pense plus* for a motto—still the crest and motto of the family.

ERSKINE, in common with many other names, has been variously spelt. In some ancient documents, it was written *Iris-kyn*; in others, *Harskyne*. Douglas states that Charles Erskine, who was made Lord of Session in 1742, and took the title of Lord Tinwald, usually spelt his name *Areskine*. The same mode of spelling seems to have been commonly practised in the family, till about 1720. In this manner at least, the name was spelt by the minister of Chirnside, and also for some time by his sons. Ebenezer and Ralph latterly wrote *Erskine*, which appears now to be the mode universally adopted.

However unimportant the connection of these clergymen with the house of Mar may or ought to be deemed, these few notices respecting it seemed to be proper. Whoever wishes to trace particularly the history of that family may consult the *Encyclopædia Perthensis*, Art. *Erskine*, written by the late Earl of Buchan; the account of the Parish of Erskine, by the late Rev. Walter Young, F. R. S. E. in the *Statistical Acc. of Scotland*, Vol. ix. No. 5; and, above all, the circumstantial detail in Sir Robert Douglas's *Peerage of Scotland*.

No. II.—PAGE 42.

The Epitaph on Mrs. Henry Erskine's monumental stone is as follows; a few words being omitted, which, on personal inspection, we could not with certainty decipher.

In spem beatæ Resurrectionis, in
Domino nostro Jesu Christo, Hic recondun-
tur cineres selectissimæ Fœminæ

MARGARITÆ HALCRO, ex illustri et
 perantiquâ stirpe, nempe, Domo de
 Halcro Orcadiensi, prognatæ ;
 quondam Reverendo et admodum cele-
 berrimo viro, Domino Henrico Erskino
 ecclesiæ Chirnsidensis pastori, fide-
 lissimo matrimonio conjunctæ ; post
 cujus obitum, per 39 ferè annos perdu-
 ravit vidua. Erga
 Religio
 Liberorum provida, tandem . . .
 Felicissimè in Christo obiit Jan. 14. 1725.
 ætatis suæ 78.

In piam gratitudinem . . .
 amantissimæ et officiosissimæ Parentis
 superstitis suæ, Magister Ebenezer Erskinus
 Pastor Portmoachensis, et Mr. Rodolphus
 Erskinus Fermilodunensis, Monumen-
 tum hoc extruendum curaverunt.

M. H.

No. III.—PAGE 46.

Mr. Crichton's Life of Col. Blackader contains three excellent letters from the Colonel to Mrs. Balderston. The quotation, p. 46, is from the first. In the second, bearing date "Busse, Nov. 7, 1705," he informs her of his promotion to the rank of Major, and alludes to a number of texts of Scripture she had furnished him with for his encouragement amidst the perils with which he was surrounded. The third, dated "Stirling Castle, Dec. 5, 1720," is particularly interesting, being a letter of consolation to Mrs. Balderston, on occasion of the death of her excellent husband. See Life of C. Black. pp. 267-8, 511-514.

It will gratify the pious reader to see the two following paragraphs—the last in her Diary.

"June 28, 1737, was my birth-day. I had lain all night

waking and saw day break. Then, the sun shining upon the wall of the room, I cried, ‘O that the Sun of Righteousness would arise and shine upon dead and dark me;’ and it was said unto me, [*i. e.* these words were brought to her remembrance, and impressed on her heart,] ‘Arise and shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’ This was a sweet close of my fourscore and four, and a sweet beginning of my eighty-five. Nevertheless, the battle with Satan and unbelief began to vex me. But I am under the care of my dear and kind Lord, who has said he will never leave me nor forsake me; but will perfect the good work that he has begun, and carried on such a length of time. Nothing have I to look to but his own faithfulness, which will not fail them that trust in him. While I am here I must look for a new battle; but, blessed be his name, I am allowed to seek a *new supply* out of that inexhaustible fullness of God in Christ my Lord. This is my anchor hold sure and within the vail—at last will draw me home. Then I shall be ever with the Lord, which I long for—to behold his glory.

“This is the third day of July, the Lord’s day—Confined to my room through age and weakness. But my Lord is not confined, but can visit desolate widows, left of all earthly comfort. Then is his time to lift up, and carry through all difficulties. I have reason to bless Him, who breaks all idols to me. O come, Lord Jesus; come, take thy own room in my soul, for I am thine. I know, he that hath said he will come, shall come, and will not tarry; and hath said, ‘Behold, I come quickly.’ Even so come. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus: and I set to my Amen.

JEAN ERSKINE.”

NO. IV.—PAGE 57.

Among the papers of the Rev. Ralph Erskine, we have found two sermons composed by his father, “written out of his book” about the year 1708. The following extract from one of them may serve as a slight specimen of his manner of preaching. Though it may not contain so full an exhibition of the ground

of acceptance, or of the sinner's free access to the Saviour and his righteousness, as some of his other discourses probably did, it shows the zeal and earnestness with which Mr. Erskine of Chirnside endeavoured to reprove the ungodly, and awaken the secure.

The subject of the discourse is Matt. v. 20. "For I say unto you, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." After giving a short account of the Scribes and Pharisees, and pointing out particularly in what respects our righteousness must be superior to theirs, he concludes with a close and faithful application :

"This subject may be improved for fear and terror to those whose righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Seeing their righteousness cannot qualify for the kingdom of heaven, what shall become of those many millions of men and women that have none at all? What shall become of those that live openly profane and avowedly unclean? What shall become of those that are swearers, liars, drunkards, whoremongers, haters of religion? What shall become of persecutors and oppressors, of all railers and revilers, of all who spend their time and strength in the service of sin? I tremble to think what a great part of mankind shall be shut up in the lowest hell, fettered in darkness, and chained in sorrow, burnt up with the violent flames of their own lusts, to all eternity. Be afflicted, and mourn and weep, ye that forget the Lord, lest he tear you in pieces when none can deliver. By a standing purpose and irresistible law, the gates of heaven are shut up against impenitent sinners. 'They that do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Alas! will you, like Esau, foolishly sell your birth-right, your freedom and interest in your Father's house? Will you renounce the joys and immunities of heaven for the pleasures of sin that presently perish? Consider that the gates of hell are open for all impenitent sinners. 'Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.' What do you think of it, to hear it told? And it is certain and true, as God is true, that except your righteous-

ness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, but shall be thrown into hell, where the smoke of your torment shall ascend for ever and ever. This is sad indeed."

He then proceeds, in the same rousing and searching strain, to specify a number of instances in which many who flatter themselves with hopes of heaven, come far short of the Scribes and Pharisees. The discourse ends with a pressing exhortation to the hearers to awake and bestir themselves ; to lay hold on eternal life ; and to give diligence to make their calling and election sure.

No. V.—PAGE 69.

The author has had the satisfaction to see a few of the manuscript volumes here alluded to. One of them is of considerable size, and is distinguished by these words on its title page ; " This Book belongs to me, Ebenezer Areskine, 1699, 1700, 1701, 1702." Its contents are various, and a great proportion of it was written at later dates than the last of these years. His Diary at least, some account of which is given in Chap. iii. pp. 174-177, was not begun till November 1707. Among its earlier materials, this volume comprises ample extracts from authors he had read, including Charnock's Discourses, Ferguson on the Necessity of Christ's Satisfaction, Wilkin's Gift of Prayer, Polhill's *Speculum Theologiæ*, Echard's Ecclesiastical History, Howell's Elements of History from the Creation to Constantine the Great, Calamy's Caveat against the Camisarian Prophets, Turner on Providence, and Pierce's Defence of the Dissenters in England.

The first hundred and eleven pages, however, are filled with the heads of about forty sermons he had heard ; most of which were preached on various occasions in Edinburgh, some in 1698-9, and one or two so early as 1694. These notes are all written in common hand ; but Mr. Erskine refers to his own short-hand books, from which they were abridged, and three of which we have seen, viz. " Books 5th, 6th, and 9th"—which appear to have been written at church while the discourses were being de-

livered. "Book 5th," which is in our possession, besides part of a Compend of Turretine's System, contains forty-five lectures and sermons apparently of that description. "Book 6th," dated March 28, 1700, contains forty-two sermons; and "Book 9th" consists chiefly of sermons preached at Leslie by Mr. Shaw during the years 1701-2.

Among the clergymen, the substance of whose discourses he thus preserved, we find also the Rev. Messrs. Hastie of Glasgow; Forrest, Stirling; John Anderson, St. Andrews; Thomas Black, Perth; Thomas Halyburton, Ceres; John Hunter, Ayr; Currie, Haddington; Clark, Dirleton; Wiseheart, Leith;—with the following Ministers of Edinburgh, Dr. Gilbert Rule, Dr. George Campbell, and the Rev. Messrs. Crichton, Andrew, George Meldrum, George Hamilton, James Webster, John Moncrieff, John Law, James Grier.

The Note-books which he wrote posterior to his ordination to the ministry, include *passim* the particulars of sermons by several ministers; as by Mr. Mair of Culross, 1707; Mr. M'Gill of Kinross, 1709; Mr. Currie of Kinglassie, and his own brother Ralph, 1713; and, to name no more—by Mr. Andrew Black of Cumbernauld, at the ordination of the Rev. David Telford at Downe, Thursday, March 19, 1747.

No. VI.—PAGE 187.

In former times, the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland were accustomed to make occasional visits to all the parishes connected with them respectively; at which, after hearing a discourse by the minister of the parish visited, as a specimen of his usual appearances in the pulpit, a series of questions were proposed to him, and then to the heritors, elders, and heads of families successively, with respect to the manner in which their several duties were discharged. In the year 1710, the parish of Portmoak received a Presbyterial visitation of this sort, the particulars of which are detailed in the Records of Presbytery. As the account throws light on the condition of the parish at that time, and confirms the truth of some circumstances stated in the text

regarding the minister's attention to his duty, we shall quote the greater part of it here. It is as follows :

“ At Portmoak Kirk, Sep 20, 1710.

“After prayer, *Sederunt*, Mr. Thomas Russell, Modr. &c. According to appointment, the Presbytery met here this day ; and Mr. Erskine, minister of this Congregation, preached on that text, Ps. xxiii. 4.—being his ordinary, wherein he was approved. Mr. Erskine was interrogated, 1. If he gave due intimation of this visitation to the Parish ? Answered, Yes. 2. If his Session-book be in readiness, in order to be revised ? Answered, that the minutes are not yet filled up in the register. He was ordered to cause fill them up, to the end they may be revised. 3. If he preaches twice, and lectures, every Lord's day ? Answered, Yes. And if he hath week day's sermon ? Answered, Yes, except in seed-time and harvest. 4. If he examines and visits the parish, and visits the sick ; and if he pray in families when he visits, and if he pray over the sick ? Answered, Yes. 5. If he intimates the Assembly's Act against profaneness ? Answered, he did read the same. 6. If he intimated the Act against the abuses by penny-weddings ? Answered, Yes, and speaks to the people to be married thereanent, and preaches against these abuses. 7. If he reads the Synod's Act anent Testimonials, and if it be insert in their Session-book ? Answered, Yes. 8. If he administers the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ? Answered, Yes, and that he has administer the same thrice, since [he] came to the congregation. 9. If all the parishioners attend the ordinances ? Answered, he cannot complain. 10. If all the elders attend the Session ? Answered, Yes, except two, who have abandoned the same. 11. If they pray in their families ? Answered, he thinks so. 12. Are they grave, pious, and exemplary in their lives ? Answered, So far as he knows. 13. Are they diligent, careful, and impartial in the exercise of their office ? Answered, Yes. 14. Do the elders call for testimonials from persons who come to reside in the parish ? Answered, He does it himself, as he goes through visiting. 15. Does the Session appoint a ruling elder to attend Presbyteries and Synods ? Answered, Yes.—Mr. Areskine removed.... The Presbytery are well satisfied with his answers

to the foresaid queries; and being called in, this was intimated to him, and then removed.

“The HERITORS were called. Mr. Kirkaldy compeared for Sir Robert Douglas of Kirkness, Bailie Steidman for Sir John Bruce; as also compeared Gospetrie, George Burrell, and several other Fewars in the parish, who were interrogate, 1. If their minister gave timeous intimation of this visitation? 2. If he has a Gospel-like conversation? 3. If he keep close by his work? 4. If he be careful of ministerial visits, and if he pray in families, when he visits? 5. If he exercise discipline against delinquents? To which queries they answered in the affirmative. . . .

“The ELDERS were called. They compeared. These queries that were proposed to the Heritors were interrogate them.

They answered *ut supra* [as above;] and then they were inquired if all the Elders attend the Session? Answered, Yes, except two. The Elders removed.

“The MASTERS of families were called. Such of them as compeared were interrogate *ut supra*. They answered, *ut supra*.

“Mr. Areskine was called; he compeared. He was interrogate if he discoursed these elders who have abandoned the Session, why they did not attend the same? Answered, there was a Committee of Session appointed to discourse them thereanent, as the minute of the Session bears. . . .”

The passages omitted relate merely to the School-master's salary; and to some necessary repairs of the Church and Manse, which the Heritors consented to make.

No. VII.—PAGE 193.

The following is a copy, taken from the original Record of the Regulations for a praying Society at Portmoak, composed by Mr. Erskine in the year 1714.

“1. That upon the 15th and the last day of every month, we will meet together in order to the spending of some time in prayer and conference about things of a spiritual concern.

2. That every one of us shall endeavour, through the strength

of grace, to walk circumspectly as becometh the Gospel, and study to curb and restrain vice, and promote holiness and religion, to our utmost power, in the station wherein God has placed us ; and, particularly, that we will maintain good order in the several families we pertain to, as far as we have access.

3. If we observe any of the Society to fall into any sin, or to be guilty of any thing unsuitable to the Gospel, he that observes it shall, with Christian freedom, warn the party of it. And if he offend again in the same kind, the observer shall join with him one or two more to warn the same party ; and if he will not hear them, the observer, or any other, shall then acquaint the Society at our next meeting, and if he will not hear them, he shall then be excluded out of the Society, and shall not be admitted again till the Society be satisfied anent his repentance and amendment ; and when received, it shall be done by a vote of the Society.

4. For order's cause we shall have a Moderator, to whom every member shall direct his discourse ; and who shall ask the judgment, and gather the votes of the Society. The Moderator to continue only for half a year, and then another to be chosen in his room.

5. Every half year when the Moderator is chosen, we shall have our private censures ; wherein each member of the Society shall remove by turns, until the Moderator inquire at the several members, if they know any thing in the life and conversation of the member removed ; and, when called in, he shall be admonished, reprov'd, or encouraged by the Moderator, as there is occasion.

6. When any member is absent, he shall give his excuse at the next meeting ; and when any absent themselves, without reason, for several diets together, they shall be excluded from the Society.

7. For admission into our Society, we shall not be too strict, nor too large. Not too strict, in refusing to admit any, in whom we have good hopes of sincerity, although they may be but weak in gifts. Nor too large, in admitting any who may be unsound in principle or in practice.

8. If the Society shall increase to the number of —, in that case we will divide ourselves into two Societies ; and in order to

maintain unity, notwithstanding of this division, there shall be a general meeting upon the last day of every third month.

9. Nothing shall be divulged that is spoken in the Society, which may in the least tend to the prejudice of the Society, or any member thereof.

10. Every meeting shall be opened by prayer, and closed with singing and thanksgiving.

11. The members of the Society shall pray by turns, according to the alphabetical order of their names ; and at every meeting three, and at most five or six, shall pray ; except when Providence calls for more than ordinary wrestling.

12. At every meeting we resolve to read a portion of the Bible, and a chapter of the Confession of Faith, as subjects for discourse. . . .

13. At every meeting there shall be a question proposed to be conferred about, the next meeting. This question may be either a head of practical divinity, a controverted point, a case of conscience, or a difficult place of Scripture. Any member may propose the question ; and, in case none be started, the Moderator shall have one in readiness.

14. What further orders [*i. e.* rules] we, or any member shall hereafter think upon, we shall propound the same to the Society ; and they shall be confirmed or annulled, as shall be agreed by a plurality of votes.

15. These laws shall be read and subscribed by every new member that joins the Society ; and read openly to the whole members at every quarterly or general meeting."

These Rules are dated Oct. 29, 1714, and subscribed by Mr. Erskine, Patrick Cockburn, Session Clerk, and other fifteen individuals. The subsequent proceedings of the Society till Nov. 20, 1767, are recorded in the same book with the rules. In the year 1717, it was divided into two ; and in the year 1732 there were five societies in the parish, which held an aggregate meeting once a year.

Some of the regulations may be thought too rigid or minute. Several of them were obviously suggested by the ecclesiastical usages of the times. The 5th rule, for instance, accords with the practice of *Privy Censures* which prevailed then, and for about half a century after, in the Presbyteries of the Church of Scot-

land ; and an allusion to which, the reader will observe in page 363.—These old regulations, however, may possibly afford some useful hints to those who contemplate the establishment, or revival of praying societies.

No. VIII.—PAGE 198.

The Rev. William Mackie preached for some time prior to the Revolution, to a congregation of Presbyterians at Scotlandwell in a small house built of stone and turf. Immediately after that event, he was admitted minister of the parish of Portmoak. In a minute of a conjunct meeting of the Presbyteries of Kirkaldy and Dunfermline, held at Kirkaldy, July 10, 1688, “Mr. William Mackie, Minister of Portmoak,” is named as one of the members ; and it is stated that he was chosen Clerk. By his learning, ability, prudence, and exemplary conduct, he had the happiness to attach the parishioners to his ministry, so that very few wished to see Episcopacy restored. He was one of several ministers whom the General Assembly, about the year 1692, appointed to visit the northern Presbyteries of Scotland, in order to bring them into due submission to the Presbyterian government. He departed this life within a very few years after his translation to Markinch.

Mrs. Mackie was a daughter of the celebrated William Carstairs, Principal of the University of Edinburgh, and relict of Major Eyre, who died in Ireland soon after his marriage. She was much esteemed for piety and good sense. She survived Mr. Mackie a considerable number of years. Mr. Charles Mackie, a son of this marriage, who became Professor of Civil History in the University of Edinburgh, was a man of great knowledge, “modesty and integrity,” and held his office from 1719 till 1765. See some interesting particulars respecting him in Bower’s Hist. of the Univ. of Edinburgh, vol. ii. ch. x. pp. 140-145.

No. IX.—PAGE 199.

Almost every thing contained in the “Instructions to the Elders of Portmoak,” is included in the paper entitled “Questions agreed to by the Session 1726, to be put at least twice a-year, from this date.” These Queries are as follows:

“1. Do you visit the sick in your quarter, exhort, and pray with them?

“2. Do you inquire for Testimonials of new incomers into the parish?

“3. Do you worship God in your family morning and evening?

“4. Do you instruct and catechise your children and family in the principles of religion?

“5. Is there any unpurged scandal in your quarter of the parish?

“6. Do you exhort the ignorant, and children, to diligence in acquiring the principles of religion?

“7. Do you attend the Judicatories of the Church, when appointed?

“8. Do you attend and encourage Societies for prayer and Christian conference; particularly the monthly meeting of the Elders for that purpose?

“9. Do you study to reconcile differences that occur in your quarter?

“10. Do you recommend religion and practical godliness in your quarter by precept and example, and rebuke what is amiss?

“11. Do you study, according to Christ’s command, to reclaim offenders in private and secret, before you delate them to the Session?

“12. Do you make conscience of declaring your mind as to admitting and debarring from the Lord’s Supper, when the congregational roll is read sessionally for that purpose?”

No. X.—PAGE 236.

Mr. Erskine’s letter respecting the Assembly’s condemnation of the Marrow is understood to have been written to the Rev.

George Gillespie of Strathmiglo. A copy of it being in the possession of the author of the Portmoak MS., it was lent to a minister, who, in the year 1719, published it in the *Christian Magazine*, (vol. xiii. pp. 376-381.) We shall here extract the more valuable parts of this long epistle, which are as follows :

“ Reverend and very dear Brother,

“ I received yours by my servant. The strain of your letter, I own, was more wounding than convincing. But such smiting, I am resolved, through grace, shall not break my head, nor alienate my love from the smiter, of whose kindness otherwise I have had such convincing evidences.

“ I find you exceedingly prejudiced against the cause wherein I am now engaged. And, so far as I can perceive from your letter, it runs principally upon this ground, that you think the method we have taken in craving that an Act of Assembly may be repealed, wants a precedent, and a more suitable method might have been taken. I do indeed own that the step we have taken is somewhat unprecedented, in craving that an Act of Assembly might be repealed ; but this was inevitable, seeing such an act wanted a precedent in the Church of Scotland, and we could see no way how truth, which is so evidently wounded by that act, could be *salved* but by its being repealed. And who could repeal an Act of Assembly, but an Assembly only ? . . .

“ Because you say you cannot conceive what we can state our sufferings upon, in case the Church shall see fit to maintain her authority by inflicting *censure upon us*; who prefer *censure to obedience*,—I shall take the freedom to lay before you *the precious truths of the Gospel* that we contend for, as *wounded* by that Act of Assembly against which we reclaim.

“ 1. That believers are freed from the Law as the Covenant of Works, freed both from the *commanding* and *condemning* power of that Covenant.

“ 2. That there is and ought to be a difference put betwixt the Law as ‘the Law of Works’ and the Law as ‘the Law of Christ,’ or the Law as a rule of obedience in the hands of a Mediator. And this distinction, we judge, goes upon a scriptural foundation, though declared groundless by the Act of Assembly; which, we conceive, has a manifest tendency to confound the two

Covenants, and to stop some of the principal sources of the believer's comfort.

"3. That when the Law, as a Covenant of Works, comes upon the believer with the demand of perfect obedience as a condition of life and salvation, his only relief in this case is, to plead the perfect obedience and complete righteousness of his ever-blessed Surety ; and that this plea is so far from weakening him in the study of holiness, as the Act imports, that it is one of the principal springs thereof.

"4. That there is a fiducial act or appropriating persuasion in the very nature of justifying and saving faith. To exclude this from the nature of faith, is to abandon and condemn our Reformers and all our polemic writers, who have been ever since the Reformation contending as *pro aris et focis* against Papists for this fiducial act, under the name of the *assurance of faith*, which *toto cælo* differs from the *assurance of faith*, of which our Westminster Confession speaks, when it excludes assurance from the nature of faith. And we are afraid lest our quitting of this act of faith be a receding from our National Covenant, where the 'general and doubtful faith' of Papists is abjured. . . .

"5. That there is a deed of gift or grant made by the Father to all the hearers of the Gospel, affording warrant to ministers to offer Christ unto all, and a warrant unto all to receive him ; —which yet does not lead us to the Arminian camp.

"These, I say, are some of the special truths we contend for in our Representation, as injured by that Act of Assembly. And had it not been for the sake of these truths, I had never ventured upon this appearance ; and I humbly think them of such worth, that I durst not quit them or refuse my testimony for them for the whole world, if my heart do not deceive me. . . . It is not so much the *book* we stand up for, as these precious truths, the condemning of which as inconsistent with the Scriptures and our standards, we humbly think to be the deepest wound ever truth got in Scotland since the Reformation. And that which makes it the deeper is, that it should be given her in the house of her friends, I mean a national Assembly, whose special province it is to patronize truth and support it. Indeed we do not think that the wound was designed against truth, but against the Rev. Mr. Hogg, who recommends the book ; but that

truth is really wounded, (though by a bye-blow,) is so evident to us, that we cannot think otherwise, unless we abandon our common sense, and believe as others would have us. Alas for it ! that the authority of our Assembly should be made a tool of, to push the resentments of some *leading men*. It is no wonder, though, in that case, God suffer both the leaders and them that are led to fall into the ditch together. . . .

“Woe is me that party interest should so far prevail, as to support an Act so evidently injurious to truth. How far is this from the temper of a sober heathen, whose regard to truth made him express himself thus ; *Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas* : (I love Plato, I love Socrates, but I have a greater love for truth.) Where is the spirit of that noble Reformer, Martin Luther, who said, *Stet veritas, et ruat cælum* : (Let truth be maintained, be the consequences what they may.) Dear Sir, the peace of a national Church is a most valuable blessing, and I would gladly hope that none values it more than I do ; but, alas ! what is peace but a conspiracy, if it do not stand with truth ? He who is the God of peace hath truth also for the girdle of his loins ; and he puts such a value upon the least iota of his revealed truth, that he will reduce heaven and earth to their original nothing, rather than suffer it to fall to the ground. How, then, shall we be answerable to the God of truth, if, when truth is wounded, we do not put to our hand to heal and support it ? If we quit it, we betray our trust, and give up with our shield and buckler.

“God forbid I should be so uncharitable as to think, that truth hath no friends among the ministers of Scotland, but the few subscribers. No ; I am persuaded of the contrary ; it has many friends in the Church. But whatever *night friends*, like Nicodemus, it may have, yet commonly it has but *two witnesses*, (Rev. xi.) *i. e.* but a very few. However, it is all one with God, to work by few as by many ; by weak and foolish things, as by those that are strong and mighty. And therefore, however weak and contemptible we are in ourselves, while we are convinced that the cause is the Lord’s, I hope it shall not discourage us, though power and policy, learning, numbers, and authority, be against us I shall be glad to have your thoughts as to what has been suggested ; for however I be engaged in this mat-

ter, I desire to lie open to what religion and right reason may offer. I am,

R. and very D. B. Your very affectionate Brother
and most obliged servant,

E. ERSKINE.

This letter, we may add, is but one of many proofs which go to establish Mr. Erskine's zeal in the cause in question, and his close attention to the points at issue. We might appeal to a number of his sermons, as those on Heb. x. 22; Is. ii. 3; and Is. xlii. 21. It may also be stated, that we have seen a notebook, written chiefly by Mr. Fisher of Glasgow, which contains, among other articles, a copy of an Essay by Mr. Erskine entitled, "Arguments proving that there are no precepts in the Gospel, strictly and properly so called, which were not formerly commanded in the Moral Law." It is concluded with references to a numerous "List of divines confirming the foregoing doctrine." He names, among others, "Rutherford on the Covenant, p. 191. Burgess's *Vindiciæ Legis*, p. 262. Perkins on Matt. iii. 17. *Prof. Leydenses Syn. pur. Theol. Disp.* 22. *Turret. Theol. Loc.* xiv. § 8, 9. *Mastricht. Theol. Theor. Pract. Lib.* v. cap. i. § 30. *Witsii Animad. Iren.* cap. xv. § 8, 9. *Calvini Instit.* Lib. ii. cap. ix. § 2. The essay extends to nine pages 12mo. in short-hand characters; and the following words are written at the close by Mr. Fisher: "Taken out of a Manuscript by my beloved friend, Master Eben. Erskine, 1726."

No. XI.—PAGE 487.

The design of this "Abridgment" of Mr. Erskine's sermons is thus expressed in the last sentence of the Preface: "It is hoped that this work will be one great means of diffusing useful knowledge among the lower community, especially those who are lay preachers in the different bodies of Methodists." The author testifies his respect for Mr. Erskine in the following terms: "It will be readily acknowledged by those who peruse his writings,

that he was an able minister of the Gospel. He made choice of the most interesting subjects ; and it was his peculiar delight to preach *Christ crucified*, and to exalt his name." He lauds him also as possessing " a dextrous faculty in ransacking the plagues of the heart, and describing the diversified circumstances of serious and exercised souls." With a view to recommend his own Abridgment, however, he represents " many" of the *original* sermons as " tedious, and consisting of much tautology." To us it appears, on the contrary, that though some of them do admit of abridgment, they are by no means chargeable with tautology, or injured " by a multiplicity of words," to the extent alleged. But we complain of this anonymous abridger, chiefly for the liberties he has taken with regard to the *doctrinal* statements of the *original*. For the satisfaction of his readers, he states expressly in his preface, that " all the strong expressions of unconditional election and reprobation are transformed !" Now we are not aware that Mr. Erskine teaches the doctrine of absolute and unconditional decrees, either in an unscriptural or repulsive manner. While he maintains the sovereignty of the blessed God, who " has mercy on whom he will have mercy," he strictly guards his hearers against every abuse of that doctrine ; and very few preachers or authors have, with equal perspicuity and zeal, exhibited that free and full access to the Saviour, which the gospel affords to sinners, without distinction or exception. Even though his views had been erroneous, or though his mode of illustrating the mysterious subject of Divine decrees had been wrong, it would have been quite unjustifiable to alter his expressions. An abridger, it is true, is not entitled to blame for subjoining a few notes, corrective of sentiments in the original, of which he disapproves. But to "*transform the expressions*" of an author, whether living or dead, to make him employ terms or utter ideas at variance with his real belief, is a species of intermeddling altogether indefensible. However frequently it may have been practised, it bears a close affinity to the crime of doing evil that good may come ; and ought to be entirely avoided by all who make any pretensions to Christian sincerity and candour, or who resolve to do as they would be done by. Were an abridger merely to omit choice passages of an original, because they do not exactly

tally with his own views, he would still be guilty of an act of injustice, both to the author and the readers. To produce only one example, an omission of this kind occurs in the very first sermon of the "Series" in question, viz. a discourse on Luke xvii. 21, in which an excellent "word of consolation and advice" at the close, addressed to those in whose hearts the kingdom of God has been set up, is wholly passed over; for this reason, probably, that it explicitly involves the doctrine of the final perseverance of all genuine converts—a doctrine denied by the Rev. *John Wesley* and his followers. It is hoped that if any other Abridgment of *Ebenezer Erskine's* works shall be attempted, it will be undertaken by a person whose sentiments are more in unison with those of the original.

No. XII.—PAGE 499.

Short accounts of Mr. FISHER of Glasgow, and Mr. SCOTT of Gateshall, who were both *sons-in-law* to Mr. Erskine, are presented to the reader. The former has another and a no less powerful claim on attention, as one of the three Brethren that were his original coadjutors in the cause of the Secession. To have introduced in a *separate chapter*, considerably larger notices of all the Ministers who were deposed with him by the Assembly 1740, would have gratified our feelings, and accorded with our design. This part of the plan, however, has been waived; partly because its execution would have swelled this volume beyond its proper limits; and principally because the religious public have a right to expect, instead of brief notices, *ample memoirs*, of all, or nearly all those brethren. Let a few cursory statements respecting them, meantime, suffice.

The Rev. WILLIAM WILSON of Perth, and ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF of Abernethy, have been explicitly mentioned as associated, from the first, with Messrs. Erskine and Fisher. We have seen them protesting against the sentence of the Synod of Perth and Stirling p. 362, and against the sentence of Assembly confirming the decision of the Synod p. 366. We have noticed also their joint representation in August 1773, to that

Commission of Assembly, by which the four protesting Brethren were suspended from the exercise of the sacred office ; and their concern in the subsequent transactions pp. 367-376, 260.

For a circumstantial account of the life and character of Mr. WILSON, we refer with much pleasure to the valuable "Memoirs" of him lately published by his great-grand-son, the Rev. Andrew Ferrier of Newart-hill. We may simply state a few facts. Mr. Wilson was born in Glasgow, Nov. 9, 1690. His father, Mr. Gilbert Wilson, who was a sufferer in the cause of religion, named him *William*, after King William III. of illustrious memory. He was licensed by Mr. Ralph Erskine as Moderator of the Presbytery of Dunfermline on the 23d of Sept. 1713, and ordained at Perth, to which he had a unanimous call, on the 1st Nov. 1716.- His appointment and success as Professor of Divinity have been noticed p. 431. His services to the Secession Church were numerous and important. He had the chief hand in preparing both the first and the second Testimonies. His able "Defence of the Reformation Principles" has been repeatedly referred to pp. 223-4, 317, 403. His published sermons are pious and judicious. His admirers will be happy to see the two following extracts, which are not included in the "Memoirs" just referred to. The one, which is copied from Mr. Fisher's domestic Record, relates to Mr. Wilson's last public service, and is thus expressed. "Our two children, *Margaret* and *James*, were born at Perth, Saturday Oct. 31, 1741; about three in the morning. They were baptized next day, being Sabbath, Nov. 1st, by Mr. William Wilson, minister at Perth ; which was the last piece of public ministerial work performed by that eminent servant of Jesus Christ. He died Nov. 14, 1741." The other extract is taken from Mrs. Balderston of Edinburgh's Diary, and serves to show the estimation in which he was held by the pious, as a Preacher who united a commanding majesty with a heavenly sweetness and mildness. "Feb. 27, 1772. Heard that Mr. Wilson of Perth was to preach in his mother's-in-law, [Mrs. Alexander.] I went away rejoicing . . . He spoke upon the 73d Psalm, especially verses 23—25. But as he went along the whole Psalm, *I heard God speaking out of the man* ; and as if I had told him every thing

of my case and exercise, he was made directly to speak of it." Early and persevering devotedness to the service of God, decided superiority to worldly views and motives, studious habits combined with practical wisdom, gravity tempered with cheerfulness, firmness and zeal united with genuine moderation, and indefatigable industry in the work of his divine Master, were signally exemplified in the character of this distinguished man. In the year 1721, he married Miss Margaret Alexander, who gave birth to a numerous family, three of whom reached maturity—the Rev. JOHN WILSON of Methven; ISABELLA, who married the Rev. John Muckersie, Kinkell; and MARY, who gave her hand to the Rev. William Jameson of Kilwinning.

With regard to Mr. ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF of Abernethy, the reader will find valuable information in the *Christian Magazine*, Vol. viii. pp. 89-96, 133-140; and in the account of his daughter, Mrs. Hutchinson, in the *Memoirs of Pious Women*, Vol. iii. From these and other sources, we could have given many interesting particulars regarding this excellent man. But having learned that a full Memoir of him may soon be expected, we shall satisfy ourselves with a few notices, from which it will appear, that his history well deserves to be minutely detailed. Mr. Moncrieff was born in July 1695. His parents, Matthew Moncrieff of Culfargie, a considerable estate on the banks of the Earne, and Margaret Mitchell, gave him the name of his venerable grand-father, Mr. Alexander Moncrieff of Scoonie; (compare pp. 209, 210.) and it pleased God to imbue him with a considerable portion of that worthy minister's spirit. In early life he became the subject of deep convictions, and obtained reviving discoveries of the plan of salvation. The profession of a minister was his own cordial and decided choice. "Do not I long, O Lord," he says in his Diary, "if thou wilt give me thine own call and be with me, to have the happiness of commending Christ to others. Oh commend him effectually to my own soul." After studying philosophy and divinity at St. Andrews, he repaired to Leyden in Sept. 1716, where, under the celebrated MARCKIUS, he prosecuted theological researches for a year. Having then returned to Scotland, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Perth; and having received a call to the parish of Abernethy, he was

ordained there in Sept. 1720. His zeal and faithfulness were displayed alike in the discharge of pastoral duty, and in his more public appearances in the cause of religion. He published a learned treatise in vindication of the proper Deity of Christ. After his expulsion from the National church, a great body of his parishioners still adhered to his ministry ; and their number being increased by accessions from contiguous parishes, they built a large house, in which he preached the Gospel to a numerous congregation. Being chosen, as we have seen, p. 476, to succeed Mr. Wilson as Professor of Theology, he discharged this important trust with great fidelity for twenty years. His views and conduct in reference to the breach which took place in 1747 are well known, and have been slightly adverted to p. 451. During the Rebellion 1745-6, he and his family suffered distressing annoyance from the followers of Charles ; but nothing could induce him to desist from expressing his detestation of their cause, and from praying publicly for King George II. in their hearing. In January 31, 1749, he had the felicity to receive his son Matthew for his colleague. After an illness of a few days, he died, praising the God of his salvation, on the 7th Oct. 1761, in the 67th year of his age, and 42nd of his ministry. In the year 1722, he married MARY, a daughter of Sir John Clerk of Pennycuik, who became mother to Matthew his eldest son, and to two daughters, but lived with him only a few years. Sometime after her decease, he was united to JANE, daughter of the Rev. William Lyon, minister of Airlie, who had fifteen children, and survived her husband thirty years. His second son, Mr. William Moncrieff, who was ordained at Alloa March 14, 1749, succeeded his father in the theological chair, and retained that charge till his death, which happened August 4, 1786. Mr. Alexander Moncrieff was a very evangelical and animated preacher. Mr. Ralph Erskine has the following expression in his Diary respecting a sermon he heard him deliver at Burntisland in 1732 : “ Mr. Moncrieff preached on that word, ‘ The promise is to you, and to your children,’ a *most Gospel sermon*, with which my heart was refreshed.” He was eminently given to ejaculatory prayer. Such was his courage that his friend Mr. Wilson described him as having “ the face of a lion.” His generosity was singular, and in some instances per-

haps carried to excess. Providence having otherwise furnished him with a competent income, he refused to accept of any remuneration for his services, either as the Pastor of an associate Congregation, or as a Professor of Theology. His Sermons and Tracts were collected and published in two volumes, in the year 1779.

The Rev. RALPH ERSKINE of Dunfermline, one of the Four Brethren who subsequently joined the first Four, has been often mentioned in the course of these memoirs of his Father and Brother. We have had occasion to advert to his birth, p. 20 ; his baptism, 53 ; impressions at his father's death, 36 ; his pious conference at Portmoak, 82 ; license, 147 ; prayer before administering the Lord's Supper, 159 ; taking part in the Marrow Controversy, 238, 246 ; letter to his brother Philip, 42 ; sympathy with a dying sister, 273 ; notes of pious sayings from the lips of the first Mrs. Erskine of Portmoak, and his sermon on her death, 295-6 ; death of Margaret Dewar, his first wife, 314 ; elegy on Mr. Hamilton, 338 ; his protest against the suspension of the Four Brethren, 369 ; presence at their meeting at Gairney-bridge, 371 ; accession to the Associate Presbytery, 374, 419 ; his proposal to Mr. Whitefield, 426 ; his death, 454 ; the ordination of his son James at Stirling, 455.—A separate Life of Mr. Ralph being intended, we make no addition at present to these particulars. Further accounts of him may be seen in the Prefaces to his Works, and in Brown's Gospel Truth.

Some allusions have also been made to the remaining three Brethren, the Rev. THOMAS MAIR of Orwell, THOMAS NAIRN of Abbots-hall, and JAMES THOMSON of Burntisland. See pp. 355, 369, 371, 374-6, 419, 433. But we shall add a few notices respecting each of them distinctly.

The Rev. THOMAS MAIR, minister of the parish of Orwell, near Kinross, was the immediate successor of Mr. James Bathgate, who died in March 1724. (Compare p. 210.) We have not ascertained the particular time or place of his birth ; but have been told that he was a nephew of the Rev. George Mair of Culross. According to his own statement to Mr. Adam Gibb, too, (See Display, vol. ii. p. 131, note) it appears that when a boy at

school, he and one of his sisters were employed to transcribe part of a Treatise on Justifying Faith, ascribed to Mr. James Fraser of Brae, one of the ministers of that town. Possibly, then, he was a native of the parish of Culross, and privileged in early life to sit under the ministry of Messrs. Mair and Fraser. He seems, at least, to have adopted generally the evangelical sentiments of these good men, and to have imbibed a portion of their devotional spirit. He was esteemed a conscientious Christian, and a faithful pastor; somewhat severe in the exercise of discipline; skilful in searching the plagues and exposing the deceits of the human heart, yet prepared to exhibit with affectionate earnestness the sovereign remedy for the diseased soul. His hearers remarked that he first made them utterly naked and helpless, and then placed clearly before them the all-sufficiency of Christ as their righteousness and strength. A particular intimacy seems to have been long maintained betwixt Mr. Mair and Mr. Ralph Erskine, who often corresponded with him at Sacramental solemnities, and occasionally spent a night with him at Orwell, on his way home from the meetings of the Synod of Fife at Cupar. Mr. Erskine, in a passage of his Diary, written immediately after his return from Orwell, remarks that he had found "his conversation useful and edifying." These two ministers, we have seen, pp. 371, 419, acted in concert when they left the Judiciaries of the Church of Scotland, and, on the 18th Feb. 1737, acceded to the Associate Presbytery. (See Mr. Mair's Declaration of Secession, with Mr. R. Erskine's adherence to it in the Re-exhibition, pp. 154-166.) Mr. Mair was accustomed to exert himself with great activity in behalf of any object which he considered worthy of his zeal. As Moderator of the Associate Presbytery, he occupied a conspicuous place at their appearance before the Assembly 1739, (p. 375.) In the controversy respecting the Burgess Oath, he embraced views contrary to those that were held by his old neighbours and friends, the Messrs. Erskine; and discovered singular keenness for a time. In consequence, however, of being accused of error with regard to the extent of redemption, a difference took place between him and that Synod, to which he had adhered at the breach 1747. His avowed partiality for Mr. Fraser's Treatise on Faith, published in 1749, which contains some unguarded statements on that topic, gave

occasion to the charge. To prevent the spread of those errors, the Synod, on the 18th April, 1754, passed an Act on the subject of universal redemption. Mr. Mair having dissented from the Act, and proving firmly attached to his own views spite of all their attempts to reclaim him, they suspended him in August 1755, and deposed him in April 1757. While the Synod published an illustration and defence of their procedure in this cause, Mr. Mair also gave to the world his *Reasons of Dissent from their Act of April 1754*; in which, though he expresses his approbation of the scope and substance of Mr. Fraser's Treatise, he states that he did not adopt it without exception—that it contained some passages which he did not understand, and others of which he did not approve. He published subsequently, "*The Case laid open; or an Essay to satisfy those who desire information anent the strange Breach betwixt the Associate Synod and Mr. Mair.*" Notwithstanding the measures which his Synod adopted towards him, he retained the confidence and affection of his congregation. He survived ten years, but, so far as we know, continued to stand alone; no reconciliation having taken place between him and those associate ministers by whom he was deposed. His affections seemed now to return to that party of them, whom a little before he had vehemently withstood. It is affirmed that, on going home from the meeting of Synod 1757, "he publicly condemned, and lamented over the proceedings against the separating Brethren, in which he had acted a very distinguished part." (Gibb's Display, vol. ii. pp. 131-191.) This express statement by the Rev. Adam Gibb, exactly accords with the tradition, that Mr. Mair on that occasion held penitential language to this effect; "We are verily guilty concerning our Brethren;" and that he said on his death-bed, "We made use of the sword, when we should only have employed the scabbard." He seems to have died in the year 1767. According to an elegy by an unlettered muse, engraven on a Stone erected to his memory in the Church-yard of Orwell, his ministry lasted "twice twenty years." In 1768, "at the earnest desire of his Session and Congregation," a course of sermons which he had preached in 1728 on "*A Covenant of Duty nowise inconsistent with a Covenant of Grace,*" was published for the benefit of his Widow, who is said to have been a woman of eminent piety and

prudence. We are assured that he wrote a private Diary of his life and experience ; but do not know with certainty into whose hands it has now fallen. In the "Memoirs of the Public Life of Mr. James Hogg," Mr. Mair is mentioned, in the "Preface by the Editor," the late Rev. Archibald Bruce of Whitburn, as having been the possessor of the manuscript copy of Mr. Hogg's "Testamentary Memorial," from which the materials of that curious narrative were extracted.

The Rev. THOMAS NAIRN was a son of the Rev. Samuel Nairn, a worthy minister in the north of Fife, who lived to see him invested with the sacred office. He received his license from the Presbytery of Cupar, and was ordained minister of the parish of Abbots-hall by the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, Sep. 7, 1710. His talents were very respectable ; and, though his conduct in future years was not always guided by the dictates of prudence, he appears to have greatly endeared himself to his people at the commencement of his ministry. When a Presbyterial visitation took place at "Abbots-hall Kirk, Sep. 11, 1712," highly favourable accounts were given of his diligence and faithfulness, "and the Presbytery are well satisfied to hear of such a good understanding between the minister and the people of the place." (Rec. of Kirk. Presb.) For nearly twenty years he was a co-presbyter of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine's ; and in most instances he concurred with him in his views of ecclesiastical procedure. His accession to the Associate Presbytery, according to an entry in Mr. Ralph Erskine's Diary, was given at a meeting of that court in Mr. Wilson's house at Perth, the 12th October, 1737. Within less than six years after that date, however, in consequence of having espoused the principles of the Old Dissenters relative to the existing civil government, he withdrew from the communion of the Seceders. Disapproving on various grounds of the Act for renewing the Covenants, he presented, on the 3d Feb. 1743, Reasons of Dissent from that Act, and of Secession from the Associate Presbytery. Answers to these Reasons, with a declaration of the Presbytery's principles respecting the present civil government, were formally approved, Sep. 29, 1743, and soon after published. A large account of this affair may be seen in Gibb's Display, vol. i. pp. 257-344. On the 1st August, 1743,

the Reformed Presbytery was constituted by Mr. John Macmillan and Mr. Nairn. Some parts of his behaviour, nevertheless, having given offence to the other members of that Presbytery, Mr. Nairn deserted their communion, and returned to the fellowship of the Established Church. After making humiliating confessions to the Presbytery of Kirkaldy, and submitting to their admonitions, (Rec. of Kirk. Presb.) he was admitted to Christian privileges in May 1751. We have not been able to learn the precise time of his birth, or of his death.

The Secession found a brighter ornament, and a more steady supporter, in the Rev. JAMES THOMSON of Burntisland, who acceded to the Associate Presbytery on the 1st June, 1738. He was the son of a respectable farmer, and born at Finmonth, in the parish of Kinglassie, about the year 1682. From his childhood he discovered a pious and a literary spirit. A decided predilection for the Christian ministry, which he had early formed, enabled him to overcome a variety of difficulties and discouragements, which would have subdued a less vigorous and resolute mind. His father having removed to a farm in the parish of Markinch, he received the first rudiments of learning in the parochial school of that village. He then prosecuted his studies at the University, probably, of St. Andrews. He was licensed to preach the Gospel sometime before July 1715. In the month of July 1718, he was called to the parish of Ballingry; (Rec. of Kirk. Presb.) but, owing to a want of harmony created by the strenuous exertions of a few individuals in favour of another candidate, the call was set aside. (Comp. p. 355.) Having afterwards received a call to Burntisland, he was ordained minister of that parish, May 7, 1719; Mr. Nairn of Abbots-hall presiding in the transaction. He married a daughter of the Rev. Joseph Drew, who, in the year 1708, was translated from Markinch to St. Andrews, where he was admitted minister of St. Leonard's, and Principal of St. Leonard's College. Mrs. Thomson, who left no children, having died several years before her husband, her sister, Miss Drew, resided with him till his death.—At the time of Mr. Thomson's settlement, owing to some unhappy circumstances which had previously occurred, there was an Episcopal meeting-house at Burntisland that was frequented by the greater

part of the population. His ministry, however, was very successful in collecting the scattered flock, and in promoting their peace and edification. Within a few Sabbaths after his ordination, the people almost universally returned to the parish church, and the English service was discontinued. An attempt made a few years after to revive the cause of Episcopacy, proved quite abortive. "There could not be got so much as the face of a meeting." These circumstances are modestly stated by Mr. Thomson himself, in a letter he wrote to Mr. Wilson of Perth, for the purpose of vindicating himself against a calumnious representation of his settlement, which one had ventured to propagate subsequently to his becoming a Seceder. (See this letter in Wilson's Continuation of a Defence, &c. pp. 25-27.)

The high estimation in which this deserving minister was held in his parish, is strongly marked by the circumstances which occurred after the Assembly's sentence of deposition, 1740. Mr. Andrew Black, the parochial teacher, refused to comply with the orders of the Presbytery, enjoining him to give official intimation to the Elders of the Assembly's sentence; and, after thrice disobeying their reiterated injunction to that effect, was himself, for his alleged contumacy, deposed from the office of Schoolmaster and Session Clerk at Burntisland, (Rec. of Kirk. Presb.) No person could be found in the parish that would dare to lock the church-door against Mr. Thomson. Both the Presbytery and the General Assembly were mortified at the obstructions that opposed and retarded the execution of their sentences. At last, in the year 1743, after urgent applications to the highest civil authorities in the kingdom, a messenger was sent from Cupar, by the Sheriff of Fife, to lock the doors, and deprive him of his Church. Though he was succeeded by a Mr. Robert Spears, a highly popular minister, translated from Linlithgow, a great proportion of the parishioners joined Mr. Thomson in secession. On occasion of the unhappy rupture 1747, he took the same side with Messrs. Moncrieff and Gibb. After an active and useful life, he entered into the joy of his Lord in 1766, in the 82d year of his age, and the 47th of his ministry.

Mr. Thomson was universally regarded as a man of distinguished piety and good sense. He maintained through life the habit of rising at a very early hour. After devoting the morning

to study and spiritual exercises, it was his practice to recreate himself by walking in the open air, and to make pastoral and friendly visits to his people at their houses. By our esteemed friend, the Rev. David Ross, the present minister of the United Associate Congregation of Burntisland, to whom we are indebted for part of these notices respecting Mr. Thomson,—we are informed, that it appears his labours were abundantly blessed, from the sincere piety of many that were educated under his ministry, and whose memory is still fragrant in that place. He gave decided evidence of a liberal and disinterested spirit. When his meeting-house was erected, he not only presented his people with a piece of ground for its site, but sustained a considerable share of the expense of the building. By his last will, too, he bequeathed to them his manse and garden, with a goodly number of his books, for the use of his successors in office. We have not seen or heard of any publications by Mr. Thomson. His Note-books, however, some of which we have had the satisfaction to examine, are carefully written in common hand, and sufficiently demonstrate the pious solicitude he felt to make his hearers thoroughly acquainted with “the whole counsel of God.” May the excellent spirit of this truly good man universally actuate and adorn the ministers of the Secession, and of every Christian Church !

THE END.

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